Resilience in the Context of Learning English as a Foreign Language in Vietnam:

An Exploratory Study Using Complex Dynamic Systems Theory

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HOANG KHANH BAO

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ABSTRACT

Learning a second/foreign language can be an arduous process during which the language learner may encounter many challenges both from the context and from within. To maintain the learning process and to succeed, it seems that the learner needs *resilience* - the ability to bounce back from adversity. Although success in second/foreign language learning has been claimed by SLA researchers to be attributable to various contextual and individual factors, resilience has received scant attention in the field of second language acquisition. This study explores the concept of resilience to shed light on the phenomenon of success in foreign language learning despite challenges and difficulties. It aims to conceptualise *foreign language learner resilience* in the context of English teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam. The study is guided by the overarching research question *What does foreign language learner resilience look like?*

This study explored foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system. Accordingly, it took the notions of self-organisation of complex dynamic systems and retro-diction in researching complex dynamic systems as the basis for designing the research. The foreign language learner resilience system, hence, was explored retrospectively by identifying a selection of people who seemed to typify resilient learners and the study worked backwards to explain how they had become so. The study employed a qualitative research design which included focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, sequentially linked with each other, as the two main data collection methods. Three focus group discussions were conducted with teachers of English at a university in Vietnam (N=13) to identify typical resilient language learners seen as possible patterns in the system. Based on the focus group discussion data, questions for semi-structured interviews were developed for the second phase of data collection which aimed to identify the components of the system. Thirty students who self-identified as resilient English learners voluntarily participated in the semi-structured interviews. They included first-year students (N=17) and fourth-year students (N=13) from the same university.

Findings indicated that foreign language learner resilience is a complex dynamic system, composed of contextual and individual factors emerging from the interactions between the students and aspects of three contextual dimensions (community/society, institution and family), across their English learning trajectories. Core to the system are motivation, emotion, agency, autonomy, perseverance and optimism evolving and fluctuating in association with their interactions with the above contexts. The system is characterised by the nonlinear

interactive mechanism between factors both detrimental and conducive to the language learning process.

The findings of this study attest to the conceptualisation of resilience as a process in mainstream psychological research. Given the scant research into the concept in the SLA field, this study provides a new and deeper understanding of resilience in second/foreign language learning. More importantly, its findings help integrate a disparate set of contextual and individual factors influencing second/foreign language learning success. As the study presents a new concept to the context of foreign language education in Vietnam, it provides teachers and administrators with insights into the difficulties and challenges Vietnamese EFL learners at the university level might face and the resources they can draw on in the face of adversity or stress. Drawing on the findings, it is suggested that teacher-student rapport should be enhanced to contribute to generating a synergy of motivation, positive emotions, autonomy and agency, perseverance and optimism that help the learners withstand challenges and difficulties to succeed in foreign language learning.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDST	Complex dynamic systems theory
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL	English as a foreign language
FLLR	Foreign language learner resilience
ICT	Information and communication technology
SLA	Second language acquisition

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

It is undeniable that learning another language in addition to the first is a long and arduous process. Larsen-Freeman (2011) asserts that "[l]anguage, its use, its evolution, its development, its learning, and its teaching are arguably complex systems" (p. 52). Her statement signifies the complexity of second/foreign language learning during which the language learner is subject to being influenced by various factors intricately connected. In addition to the external factors from socio-cultural contexts, language learners are influenced greatly by individual learner factors such as motivation, emotion, or autonomy which have also been asserted in numerous research studies to be catalysts for sustaining and succeeding in learning a foreign language. Given the complexity of influences, second/foreign language learning is a developmental process where language learners may experience ups and downs. While the "ups", including contextual and individual factors, enable their learning, the "downs" which may include challenges or crises emerging at some stages in the learning process could prevent them from moving forward. Overcoming challenges or crises to regain momentum, sustain and succeed in second/foreign language learning requires *resilience*, "the ability to prevail against risk factors and succeed despite odds" (Oxford, Meng, Yalun, Sung, & Jain, 2007, p. 132).

For over 40 years, the concept of resilience has been repeatedly asserted in psychological research as playing a vital role in the development and achievement of an individual in the presence of adversity. The recent expansion of research into the construct in many other disciplines has also confirmed that its significance is not limited to psychology only. The coining of the term *academic/educational resilience* in educational research can be seen as a typical example of the universal application of a seemingly promising concept into different social spheres. In fact, it has proved to be a powerful concept as research on academic/educational resilience in different educational contexts has affirmed that resilience is one of the determinants enabling learners to withstand and rebound from difficulties or adversity. Martin and Marsh (2006) explain that "academic resilience is relevant to all students because at some point all students may experience some level of poor performance, adversity, challenge, or pressure" (p. 267). Despite such extensive discussion of the concept in education, Oxford et al. (2007) stated that "resiliency is a vibrant, recognized research field not yet discovered by L2 researchers" (p. 132). Although the problem seems outdated because it was raised more than a decade ago, it has recently been brought back for discussion by a number of

researchers in second language acquisition (see e.g. Kajabadi, HajiMohammadi, & Pahlavani, 2016; Kamali & Fahim, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2017; Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2017, 2018, 2019; Nguyen, Stanley, Stanley, Wang, & Gritter, 2015)

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL henceforth) education in Vietnam, students' low level of proficiency after years of study at the tertiary level is often cited as one of the shortcomings (Phan, 2015). It has also been claimed that such issues as large class-size, shortage of resources and traditional and examination-oriented teaching methods are considered challenges that hinder the students' performance or achievement in English language learning (Dang, 2012; Nguyen, Fehring, & Warren, 2014; Phan, 2015; Tran, 2013a, 2013b). It seems clear that English language learners in Vietnam are exposed to a number of difficulties in the socio-cultural context. However, while the above claims portray a negative view of English language education in Vietnam with more failure than success for students under such disadvantageous circumstances, clearly not all English language learners in Vietnam fail to sustain their language learning and many gain fruitful results from their efforts. From my experience as a teacher of English to EFL students at a university in the central highlands of Vietnam, I have witnessed a number of students who performed exceptionally well in learning English and successfully won scholarships to study abroad despite the same difficult situations. What made these students so successful? Also, from the viewpoint of an English language learner who has been learning the language since the 1990s in Vietnam, I keep wondering what has driven me to move on with my language learning. These thoughts make me ask: Why do some students who are exposed to difficulties succeed in their language learning, while others do not? Will research into resilience in foreign language learning help shed a light on this? What individual learner/contextual factors actually hinder English language learners in Vietnam? What factors can help them sustain and improve their language learning?

While my curiosity about the explanatory power of resilience, albeit little-researched in foreign language learning, has motivated me to explore it, my own self-reflective questions have inspired me to conduct this exploratory study into resilience in foreign language learning in the context of Vietnam.

1.2. Aim of the study

This research project aims to bring to the fore and conceptualise more clearly resilience in foreign language learning. It aims to explore the components of resilience in the context of English language education at the university level in Vietnam. In particular, it seeks to identify

the challenges (risk factors) English language learners at the university level in Vietnam are exposed to during their language learning, the factors that help them sustain or succeed in learning English (protective factors) despite challenges, and the resilient responses that Vietnamese English language learners might demonstrate. Specifically, it seeks to answer the overarching question followed by sub-questions as follows:

What does resilience look like in language learning?

- What do resilient EFL learners look like?

- What factors do Vietnamese tertiary learners perceive as limiting their English learning?

- What factors do they perceive as enabling their English learning?

- What responses do they report making to the challenges and difficulties?

As the study focuses on conceptualising foreign language learner resilience in the Vietnamese context of English language teaching and learning at the university level, the next section will provide a brief overview of English language education in Vietnam as a justification for the relevance of researching resilience in this context.

1.3. Context of the study

English language teaching and learning in Vietnam started to flourish when the Vietnamese government launched the economic renovation policy, also known as *Doi moi* policy in 1986 (Hoang, 2010; Le, 1999, 2011). This was, indeed justifiable as the policy loosened the controls on the economy, allowing the country to open its doors to the world, which then resulted in a dramatic increase in political, socio-economic and cultural exchanges with foreign countries. Seen as the key to international integration and socio-economic development, English was made a compulsory school subject at the lower and upper secondary levels and an elective subject at the primary level under *Decree 14/2001-TC-TTg on the Renovation of the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum* (Hoang, 2010). In 2008, the role of English in Vietnam was again emphasised when the government approved the National Foreign Languages Project 2020 under Decision 1400/QD-TTg on the project *Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system in the period 2008-2020*[1]. The major expected outcome of this

[1] Quyết đinh số 1400/QĐ-TTg của Thủ tướng chính phủ về việc phê duyệt Đề án "Dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thông giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2008-2020 [Decision 1400/QD-TTg by the Prime Minister on the approval of the project Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system in the period 2008-2020]

project was that by the year 2020, Vietnamese secondary and tertiary graduates could use a foreign language (mostly English) confidently in their daily communication, study, and work in an international environment (Nguyen, 2019).

Despite the increasing demand for English language learning and teaching and the investment of the Vietnamese government into it, the quality of English language learning in Vietnam has often been cited as "not-yet-satisfactory" (Le & Phan, 2013, p. 248). Such criticism seems to have been reinforced when the Vietnamese Minister of Education recently admitted that the National Foreign Language Project 2020 failed to achieve its expected outcome (Nguyen, 2017). Most researchers in English language education in Vietnam tend to concur that the disappointing quality of English learning pertains to, but is not necessarily limited to, the traditional classroom culture, the passive learning style of the learners, grammar-focused and examination-oriented teaching methods, and large class sizes (Le, 1999, 2011; Nguyen, 2019; Pham, 2016; Pham, 2005; Pham, 2017; Tran, 2020).

In discussing classroom culture, Le (1999) states that the teacher-student relationship is hierarchical, and alongside other researchers, has sought to explain the reason why this is the case. Vietnamese students are often assumed to share characteristics with those in East Asian countries influenced by Confucianism. They are often described as passive learners who depend totally on the teacher, listening to the lectures, taking notes and reproducing their memorised knowledge in exams (Phan, 2013; Tran, 2013a). In the classroom, the teacher is the knowledge provider and students are not allowed to confront the teacher directly (Le, 1999; Nguyen, 2014). In addition, both Phan (2013) and Tran (2013b) agree that issues such as large class-sizes, shortage of resources and traditional teaching methods have negative impacts on the students' language learning process. For example, Tran (2013b) affirms that such factors as students' mixed level of English proficiency, limited teaching materials, grammar-based and examination-oriented teaching methods, limited class time and teachers' inadequate investment of time and effort in teaching preparation and renovation are major factors affecting the low quality of English teaching and learning at Vietnamese universities. In the same vein, Nguyen et al. (2014) reported on factors, hindering the efficacy of English language teaching and learning at a Vietnamese university. These factors, as reported by teachers at the university, include insufficient time for English subjects, lack of a speaking component in tests and examinations, students' unequal English abilities, large class sizes, limited support from university leaders, and students' limited effort and motivation. Given the aforementioned short-comings, it is not surprising that the rector of a university in one of the biggest cities in Vietnam asserted that "usually 42 percent of students of this university are not eligible to receive

undergraduate degree just because of their low level of foreign language (English) proficiency" (which can be interpreted as failing to meet the National English Proficiency benchmarks as a requirement for university graduation in Vietnam) (Lan, 2019). The most recent results of the national examination (the results of this examination serve as a requirement both for high school graduation and tertiary education application) showed an increase in the median score of the English test results from 4 to 4.2 (over 10) (Hang, 2020). Although this number reflects the quality of English teaching and learning at the high school level, the number also raises the question as to whether the English proficiency level would be improved at the university level given the shortcomings in English teaching and learning at Vietnamese universities.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the recent efforts of the Vietnamese government and the educational system in raising social awareness of the importance of foreign languages for international integration. More specifically, the implementation of the National Foreign Languages Project 2020's programmes, including the redesign of the curriculum, provision of professional development training courses for teachers, and promotion of ICT application in foreign language teaching (Tran, 2020) can be seen as initial steps to generate a better learning environment for Vietnamese EFL learners. Recently, the Vietnamese Prime Minister has signed the Decision 2080/QĐ-TTg to approve the adjustments and supplements to the National Foreign Languages Project[2], allowing the project to be extended until the year 2025. This has created more favourable conditions for positive changes in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

The above brief discussion of the English language teaching and learning in Vietnam indicates the likelihood that Vietnamese English language learners are vulnerable to a number of negative factors, which impede their success in their English language learning. This also indicates that besides the disadvantages, there are also potential resources for Vietnamese EFL learners to draw on to sustain and make improvements in learning English. It is important that Vietnamese EFL learners know how to navigate their learning by taking advantage of the resources from within and from the environment to cope with the aforementioned challenges and difficulties. Therefore, a resilience perspective seems to be a productive way to research language learners and learning in the Vietnamese university classroom because it looks at both negative and

[2] Quyết định số 2080/QĐ-TTg của Thủ tướng chính phủ về việc Phê duyệt điều chỉnh, bổ sung Đề án dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2017-2025 [Decision 2080/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Ministeron the approval of the adjustments and supplements to the National Foreign Languages Project period 2017-2025]

positive aspects within the socio-cultural context of language teaching in Vietnam in order to see how these factors interact to improve or sustain the process of language learning.

1.4. Significance of the study

That resilience is a little researched concept in the field of second language acquisition makes this study potentially significant in both theoretical and practical terms.

In theoretical terms, this study, firstly, hopes to add to the SLA literature on factors influencing the success in second/foreign language learning by clarifying the under-researched concept of resilience in foreign language learning. More importantly, the study seeks to link the disparate sets of contextual and individual factors which have all been claimed to be the most important for language learning in the SLA literature, as it looks into both individual and contextual factors in examining resilience. Secondly, there is also a likelihood that the study will make a contribution to the psychological mainstream research on resilience.

In practical terms, the outcome of this study is likely to inform both learning and instructional practice which subsequently contribute to the improvement of EFL teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam. More specifically, the conceptualisation of resilience is expected to provide language teachers in Vietnam with information significant for adjusting their practices so that factors conducive to foreign language learning are likely to be enhanced. This research may also help Vietnamese language learners search for and identify factors and strategies to mitigate the negative factors and uplift their emotions in crises during language learning. At a macro level, the conceptualisation of resilience in language learning might inform administrators and policy-makers about the adversity that policies might have caused to Vietnamese language learners. Thus, risks and protective factors could be taken into consideration in designing policies which promote foreign language learning.

This study will also expand my own knowledge about the explanatory power of resilience in foreign language learning. Such knowledge will provide me, as a part of the system of English language education in Vietnam, with deeper understandings of language learners and guidance for my future practice.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 has set the scene for the current research. It presents the purpose of the research and justifies the need to conceptualise foreign language

learner resilience in the Vietnamese context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language at the university level.

Chapter 2 provides the conceptual framework for this research. It reviews the concept of resilience, its conceptualisation in different research contexts, and the concepts related to resilience in second language acquisition to show the relevance for researching resilience in the second/foreign language context. The chapter also proposes a working definition of foreign language learner resilience drawing on the *Complex Dynamic Systems Theory* (hereafter referred to as CDST).

Chapter 3 further argues for the relevance of using the CDST as the theoretical framework in this study. It outlines the methodological principles to be accounted for in researching foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system. The chapter justifies the selection of research methods drawing on the CDST perspective and describes the fieldwork, including research site selection, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 reports findings from three focus group discussions with 13 teachers from a university in Vietnam. It presents the teachers' perspectives on typical resilient language learners seen as possible outcomes of foreign language learner resilience.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide detailed descriptions of the factors limiting and enabling the English learning process, and the learners' responses to the challenges and difficulties drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with first-year and fourth-year students from the aforementioned university.

Chapter 7 summarises the key findings of the study and discusses the interplay between the contextual and individual factors perceived as having impeded the students' English learning process and those having enabled the students to withstand or overcome challenges.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by outlining the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the research, followed by the implications for Vietnamese university-level English language teachers, administrators or policy-makers whose actions contribute to promoting foreign language learner resilience and improving foreign language learning and teaching in Vietnam. The thesis ends with the acknowledgement of the limitations of the research, recommendations for future research, and my personal reflections on conducting the research.

CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for this current research. It reviews the concept of resilience, its conceptualisation in different research contexts, and the concepts related to resilience in second language acquisition in an attempt to show the relevance of researching resilience in the second/foreign language context. To argue for the complexity of the phenomenon, the chapter also includes a review on the *Complex Dynamic Systems Theory* (hereafter referred to as CDST) which subsequently will be used as a methodological framework for conceptualising foreign language learner resilience in the Vietnamese context of English teaching and learning at the university level.

2.1. The concept of resilience

Resilience has recently emerged as an evolving social construct which draws scholarly interest from different fields, including but not restricted to ecology and conditions of the environment, microbiology, engineering, business, and economics. A review of the literature reveals that the term *resilience* is employed in a wide range of disciplines, to refer to the persistence or the sustainability of a system, a structure or a community towards the disturbance or disruptive changes caused by humans or social or environmental conditions (Brand & Jax, 2007; McAslan, 2010, 2011). The majority of the literature is found in psychological and psychiatric disciplines (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007). The concept, in fact, has been studied for over forty years (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008) and was initially conceptualised by psychologists and psychiatrists who studied children's invulnerability despite prolonged exposure to adversity and traumatic situations (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Morales & Trotman, 2004). Psychologically, resilience is the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity or the like. As mentioned above, researchers tend to look at the psychological aspect of the term. So far, a number of synonymous terms have been used interchangeably to describe resilience, such as *invulnerability* or *invincibility*. The definition of the concept, however, has been a debated issue dependent on researchers' perspectives and the contexts in which it is studied.

2.1.1. What is resilience?

The word resilience is derived from a Latin verb "*resilire*" meaning to leap back (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Windle, 2011). It is commonly defined in dictionaries as the ability of a person to recover quickly from hardships or the ability of a substance or an object to spring back to its original shape after being bent or stretched. Despite such definitions, the term *resilience* has

more complicated connotations in psychology than it appears in dictionaries. Research into resilience dates back to the early 1970s when the concept was first introduced into psychology, drawing on inadvertent results from research in child psychiatry and developmental psychology (Luthar, 2006; Vernon, 2004). Since its inception in psychology, resilience has been defined variously due to the lack of consensus among scholars with different research focuses and approaches (Aburn, Gott, & Hoare, 2016; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Liu, Reed, & Girard, 2017; Vernon, 2004; Windle, 2011). Alongside the development of resilience science, there have been clashes between researchers with different views over defining resilience. So far, resilience has been defined as a personality characteristic, an outcome, and a process (Liu et al., 2017; Pooley & Cohen, 2010).

2.1.1.1. Resilience as a personality trait

As aforementioned, resilience research was initiated by an unanticipated research finding. Specifically, in an attempt to "capture the etiology and prognosis of psychopathology" of people with schizophrenia, Norman Garmezy, widely recognised as having laid the ground for resilience research (Vernon, 2004), noticed that children of some of these patients were astoundingly able to function well in their lives (Luthar, 2006, p. 740). Intrigued by this finding, Garmezy and his colleagues started to explore the factors related to the sporadically positive development of these children. This subsequently shifted the researchers' attention from focusing on factors detrimental to development toward those conducive to human well-being in the face of adversity (Vernon, 2004).

Along with Garmezy, E. James Anthony and Michael Rutter are also acknowledged as pioneering resilience researchers. Their fascination for the factors conducive to the individual's well-being under adverse circumstances seemed to contribute to their perspective on resilience as a personal trait. For example, while Anthony (1974) used the term *invulnerable* to describe children who were not affected by their parents' mental illnesses despite their compassionate connection with parents, Rutter (1979) attributed personal characteristics as high creativity, competence and effectiveness to resilient children of parents with psychopathology (Luthar, 2006). In 1982, Werner and Smith published their very first report on their longitudinal study on a group of children born in 1955 on Kauai in Hawaii (Vernon, 2004). Although their study is considered as a milestone in resilience science (Luthar, 2006), this first report entitled *Vulnerable but invincible* appeared to reflect their perspective on resilience as a trait. This view, to some extent, seems to remain as it still attracts the attention of some contemporary researchers in the field. Connor and Davidson (2003) for instance, defined resilience as

"personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity" (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p. 76). They developed a scale to measure resilience in either normal people or those under clinical treatment drawing on previous research on resilience. In an attempt to distance his viewpoint from other researchers, Bonano (2004) argued that psychopathological researchers limited their conceptualisation of resilience within the population of individuals having "experienced psychological problems or sought treatment" (p. 20). He insisted on examining resilience within a wider population, thus defining resilience as "the ability of the adults . . . who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event, such as the death of a close friend or a violent or life-threatening situation, to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning" (Bonano, 2004, p. 20). Despite the contribution these researchers have made to the extant literature on resilience, their perspectives have also aroused scholarly controversy (Windle, 2011). Many contemporary resilience researchers tend to refute the trait-based conception of resilience because of its connotation as a fixed personality characteristic. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000), for instance, argue that Anthony's use of "invulnerable" to describe individuals having overcome multiple risks was misleading because the term connotes an unchanging or static personality characteristic. Resilience viewed as a personality trait, thus, suggests the notion that this personal quality is "either present or absent" (Liu et al., 2017, p. 113) and those who do not possess this personal quality are potentially stigmatised as failure (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Windle, 2011). As a result, this conceptualisation limits intervention research to promote resilience (Liu et al., 2017).

2.1.1.2. Resilience as an outcome

Extant literature also acknowledges the description of resilience as an outcome. This perspective features in Masten's definition of resilience which states "[r]esilience refers to a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Drawing on the convergent findings from variable-focused and person-focused studies, Masten argued that resilience is a common phenomenon "arising from ordinary human adaptive processes" (Masten, 2001, p. 234). Researchers advocating this perspective acknowledge that Masten has taken into account the "ordinary" promotive factors such as support from family, friends or community in her conceptualisation of resilience, making resilience possibly universal to everyone (Aburn et al., 2016). However, there has been scholarly concern that defining resilience as an outcome can be problematic in that there would be a variety of outcomes depending on different contexts. In addition, there is the issue of whether outcomes would include a return to the normal functioning as before adversity, or only denote positive outcomes. For example, Coleman and Hagell (2007) criticise

the view of resilience as an outcome, attesting that this perspective on resilience is problematic because resilient outcomes defined as patterns of competence behaviour or effective functioning could be represented in "numerous possible measures of outcomes" (p. 166) such as performing well at school, maintaining relationships or avoiding crimes, and thus, there would be various possible inventories of resilience. This variation in outcomes has also been criticised by some researchers for causing difficulties in measuring and predicting resilience across contexts (Liu et al., 2017; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). According to Liu et al. (2017) neither trait-based nor outcome-based approaches to defining resilience can do justice as both represent polarised views of the same concept. Indeed, trait-based and outcome-based approaches to defining resilience are like the two poles on a continuum. While the trait-based approach tends to see resilience as a cause, the outcome-based tends to view it as a result. The view of resilience as an outcome, therefore, seems to fall into the category of resilience as a personal trait. To elaborate, if resilience is seen as an outcome, it would be an end state of the developmental process, thus becoming monolithic. As with the trait-based perspective, such a monolithic view of resilience has been questioned by resilience researchers, given the dynamic development of an individual.

2.1.1.3. Resilience as a dynamic process

As argued above, the definition of resilience as either a personal trait or an outcome is problematic. Scepticism about the notion of resilience as an individual's static characteristic has also led researchers to the process-oriented perspective on defining resilience. Rutter (1987) argues that one may successfully overcome difficulties at one point in his or her life but may not respond similarly to other challenges at another point in his or her life. He asserts that "resilience cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual" and "if circumstances change, resilience alters" (p. 317). Although Rutter's statement does not include the term process, his observation reflects the dynamic process of resilience. The process perspective was more evident when Luthar et al. (2000) differentiated ego-resiliency from resilience. They explained that ego-resiliency is a personality characteristic which does not necessarily require exposure to adversity, whereas, "resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543). This perspective was also advocated by Liddle, who posited that resilience is more than a trait, but rather should be seen as a "series of coping mechanisms and responses by the organism plus the environment" (Liddle, 1994, p. 168). In brief, proponents of this process-oriented approach to defining resilience concur that resilience is a dynamic ongoing process of positive adaptation in response to difficulties or challenges. As a dynamic process, resilience is contextually and temporally

dependent, that is, resilience could vary in different situations and at different times throughout an individual's life trajectory (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). In advocating the process view of resilience, Coleman and Hagell (2007) draw the following conclusions:

- Resilience is not a stable personal characteristic, but a process. It arises as a result of an interaction between risk and protective factors.
- Resilience is not something people have or do not have but rather it is a response to difficult circumstances.
- There are many different types of resilience, depending on the particular individual.
- Resilience is not static; it can change over the life span. It may not be apparent at one stage, but may then develop at another stage because of the availability of protective factors.
- Resilience is not to do with value judgements, but rather with an understanding of the individual's response to a complex set of positive and negative circumstances.

(Coleman & Hagell, 2007, pp. 167-168)

The above conclusions not only provide an insightful understanding of resilience a process but also partly reveal what this process involves. The next section looks further into the constituents of the process of resilience, which will serve as the basis for the conceptualisation of resilience in this study.

2.1.2. Conceptual clarification

Not surprisingly debates on how resilience should be defined have also involved discussions about the conceptualisation of resilience. Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) state that while definitions only explain the meaning of a term, the conceptualisation of a phenomenon requires "a combination of personal intuition and consistent evidence" (p. 15). In other words, for the clarification of the concept of resilience, it is essential to identify what resilience is composed of. In an attempt to analyse the concept of resilience, Earvolino-Ramirez (2007) claims that for the occurrence of a socially contextual concept there must be antecedents (events occurring prior to the occurrence of the concept) and consequences (events occurring as a result of the occurrence of the concept). In the case of resilience, the main antecedent is adversity and its consequences are the positive adaptation. It can be interpreted in this socially contextual view that resilience is a two-component construct which always consists of two interrelated

counterparts, that is, "exposure to adversity and positive adjustment to that adversity" (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2010b). Indeed, despite the discrepancy in approaches to defining resilience, it has been consistent in most definitions that for resilience to exist, two key concepts - *adversity* and *positive adaptation* must be present (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Pooley & Cohen, 2010; Windle, 2011). Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) explained that adversity, "also referred to as risk, typically encompasses negative circumstances that are known to be associated with adjustment difficulties" (p. 858). As researchers have also expanded their understanding of adversity to less stringent life events, the term may include everyday annoyances or stressors (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). *Positive adaptation*, on the other hand, is defined as "behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks" given the presence of risk/adversity (Luthar, 2006, p. 742). It is also important to note that in conceptualising resilience, adversity and positive adaptation have also been used in close association with *vulnerability/risk factors* and *promotive/protective factors* respectively (See for example Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Levine, 2003; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2006; Olsson et al., 2003; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992).

The terms vulnerability and risk factors have been clarified by Werner and Smith respectively as "an individual's susceptibility to a disorder" and "biological or psychological hazards that increase the likelihood of a negative developmental outcome in a group of people" (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 3). These terms, however, have been used interchangeably by contemporary resilience researchers to indicate factors that "exacerbate the negative effects of the risk condition" (Luthar, 2006, p. 743) or "predictors of undesired outcomes" (Masten, 2006, p. 5). Masten (2006) further expounds on the relationship between risk factors and adversity explaining that "[a]dversity and negative life events are subtypes of risk factors" (p. 5). Although various risk factors have been identified since the initial studies of resilience, Levine (2003) notes that salient findings repeatedly reported in studies often include risk factors such as poor pre-/peri-/post-natal care of mother and child, abject poverty, abuse/neglect/molestation, family dysfunction/discord/upheaval, parental psychopathology, inadequate/poor school, lack of significant nurturing adults, absence of mentors or models, war or culture of violence and chaos, and forces majeures (natural disasters) (p. 276).

As opposed to risk factors, promotive/protective factors are those that mitigate the negative effects of risk factors and/or ameliorate the positive developmental outcomes (See e.g. Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2006; Werner & Smith, 1992; Windle, 2011). For example, Luthar (2006) explains that "protective factors are those that modify the effect of risk in a positive direction" (p. 858). In a similar vein, Masten (2006) refers to protective factors as

predictors of positive outcomes as she states: “If predictors appear to play a special role under high-risk or high-adversity conditions, they are called protective factors” (p. 6). Researchers concur that protective factors are also referred to as assets and resources which can derive from within the individual, family, or community (Windle, 2011). This appears to align with findings from the longitudinal study of Werner (1995, 1997) who asserts that the participants in his study possessed a positive temperament in the early years of their lives, special hobbies to share with friends and take pride in, and an ability to make the most of their available talents in their adolescence, which helped them bring about family members’ or others’ positive reactions. They were also reported to have “affectional ties with parent substitutes such as grandparents and older siblings which encouraged trust, autonomy, and initiatives” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 192). Furthermore, Werner (1997) claims the results of his study on protective factors from within the community align with other researchers in highlighting the fact that resilient children tend to take advantage of support from community organisations such as schools or churches, which provide them with “a sense of coherence” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 192).

The review of the literature above indicates that resilience is a multidimensional concept characterised by two core concepts - adversity and positive adaptation. Moreover, resilience can only be inferred from examination of the interactive mechanism between risk and protective factors because, as aforementioned, adversity and opportunities keep emerging from the unfolding interactions between the individual and the environment. Hence, rather than being seen as a fixed characteristic of the individual, resilience should be seen as a dynamic ongoing process initiated by the interaction between risk and protective factors.

2.2. Resilience as a contextually nuanced term

Resilience is a multidisciplinary term – a term used across a wide range of disciplines and is contextually nuanced. Accordingly, there has been an emergence of concepts under study such as ecological resilience, organisational resilience, workplace resilience, economic resilience, community resilience, sports resilience and educational/academic resilience. An overview of how the concept has been applied in different fields of study will both indicate its universality and affirm the applicability of the concept in studying it as a phenomenon in foreign and second language learning.

2.2.1. Ecological resilience

The concept of resilience was first introduced to ecology in 1973 by Holling who defines *ecological resilience* as a “measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb

change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables" (as cited in Brand & Jax, 2007, p. 2). Gunderson (2000) further explains that ecological resilience is "the amount of disturbance that an ecosystem could withstand without changing self-organized processes and structures (defined as alternative stable states)" (p. 425). It is believed that debates on the definition of ecological resilience are about whether a single stable state or multiple stable states exist in an ecosystem, and that the development of research into ecological resilience aims to explain the changes and the adaptability of ecosystems (Gunderson, Allen, & Holling, 2009). Nonetheless, the concept of ecological resilience is not necessarily bound to the narrow engineering sense in ecological science. In arguing for the interdisciplinary links between urban design and planning and ecological science using the metaphor of *cities of resilience* proposed by the two scientists from both disciplines – Musacchio and Wu (2002, as cited in Pickett, Cadenasso, & Grove, 2004), Pickett et al. (2004) suggest that ecological resilience be referred to as the adaptability to changing conditions of the ecosystems viewed as open systems which take into account the role of human and other external factors instead of closed and internally regulated systems. Ecological resilience, therefore, can be interpreted metaphorically as organisational or community resilience. This view of Pickett et al. (2004) on ecological resilience attests to resilience as an ongoing process of interactions between human, as the main agents, and factors in the environment. It contributes to the justification for a conceptualisation of resilience as a complex dynamic system in this study.

2.2.2. Community resilience

In a broad sense, *community resilience* is referred to as the capacity of a community to "absorb disturbances and reorganise while undergoing change to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks" (Wilson, as cited in Madsen & Chesham, 2015, p. 14). As both terms *community* and *resilience* are contextually nuanced (McAslan, 2011), community resilience is also interpreted differently (Madsen & Chesham, 2015). For example, Fleming and Ledogar (2008), who proposed employing the concept of resilience in studying Aboriginal communities vulnerable to discrimination and historical trauma, equate communities with cultural systems. They then cite the definition by Healy that "community or cultural resilience is the capacity of a distinct community or cultural system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to retain key elements of structure and identity that preserve its distinctness" (Healy, as cited in Fleming & Ledogar, 2008, p. 3). Despite being interpreted differently in various contexts, there exists a consensus among authors that community resilience is of concern to community leaders, policy makers, scholars

and emergency managers as being a strategy or a vision to respond and bounce back from disasters (Madsen & Chesham, 2015; McAslan, 2011; Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum, & Van Horn, 2015). As presented in the previous section, community resilience is a metaphor for ecological resilience. While the term *ecological resilience* seems to have a more global connotation, the term *community resilience* seems to have a local meaning as community seems to refer to a particular group of people within a geographical space. Kruse et al. (2017) propose an extended view on the concept of community. Accordingly, the concept of community should not only be bound by a geographical space but also extended to a virtual environment where a group of individuals share the same concern, identity and/or interest. In this light, Kruse et al. (2017) developed a three-dimensional model of community resilience which involves interrelated domains viz. resources and capacity, actions, and learning. They argue that community is shaped by the interactions of these three domains which, except for the naturally available resources, appear to be almost human-initiated. Their research again indicates that resilience is not a characteristic but a dynamic process characterised by the interaction between human beings and the environment.

2.2.3. Employee resilience

In the context of the workplace, Näswall, Kuntz, Hodliffe, and Malinen (2013) conceptualised the term *employee resilience* as an "employee capability, facilitated and supported by the organisation, to utilize resources to continually adapt and flourish at work even if/when faced with challenging circumstances" (p. 1). Their study also developed a nine-item scale to measure employee resilience represented through the employee's behaviours in a supportive, learning-oriented and cooperative environment. Bardoel, Pettit, De Cieri, and McMillan (2014) also explored the role of employee resilience in the field of human resource management drawing on *Conservation of Resources Theory* (Hobfoll, as cited in Bardoel et al., 2014). Though they did not define employee resilience explicitly, they propose viewing resilience as an individual resource that is developable and necessary for employees in the context of organisations being influenced by the global financial crisis. Bardoel et al. (2014) suggest that in order to equip employees with the ability to deal with turbulence caused by constant change of workplace, resilience-enhancing human resource practices are beneficial for employees in crisis. These may include:

- Development of social support at work;
- Work-life balance practices;
- Employee assistance programs;

- Employee development programs such as resilience training;
- Flexible work arrangements, reward and benefits systems;
- Occupational health and safety systems;
- Risk and crisis management systems and;
- Diversity management.

(Bardoel et al., 2014, p. 284)

In a more context-specific study, Franken (2019) investigates employee resilience and its development by activities and practices undertaken by managers in the New Zealand public. The findings indicate that employee resilience is a dynamic construct that can be both enhanced and limited by workplace managers.

The above research studies into employee resilience reveal that employee resilience is developable. It is a relational concept as its development involves the interaction between the individual and others within the working environment. This perspective on resilience prepares the ground for the conceptualisation of resilience in this current study.

2.2.4. Economic resilience

According to Rose (2007, 2017), resilience is an important construct recognised in economic research. It is considered as an attribute when researching responses to economic shocks of an economy, a focus for analysing the sustainability in ecological economics, a construct to be studied in socioeconomics, and an important aspect for appraisal of economic loss and analysis of consequences caused by disasters. Drawing on the idea of resilience to disasters, Rose (2017) offers two definitions of *economic resilience*, including *static economic resilience* and *dynamic economic resilience* which are respectively defined as "the ability of a system to maintain function when shocked" and "the ability to hasten the speed of recovery from a shock" (p. 29). She also analyses economic resilience at three levels, namely *microeconomic resilience* (individual business or household), *mesoeconomic resilience* (individual industry or market), and *macroeconomic resilience* (combination of all economic entities, including their interactions) (Rose, 2017, p. 31). In addition to Rose's definition, economic resilience has also been conceptualised alternatively by researchers depending on the contexts of their studies. Briguglio, Cordina, Farrugia, and Vella (2009) took Singapore's economy as a reference point for defining economic resilience. They claim that although the economy of Singapore is highly exposed to economic vulnerability because of exogenous shocks (from economic openness and export concentration), this island state still attains a high economic growth rate and GDP per

capita. In this regard, economic resilience is defined as "the policy-induced ability to withstand or recover from exogenous shocks arising from economic openness" (Briguglio et al., 2009, p. 229). Their research also proposes an index of economic resilience as a set of criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of economic policies at both macro and microeconomic levels. Dinh, Freyens, Daly, and Vidyattama (2016) critique the notion of economic resilience as defined by Briguglio et al. (2009). They claim that economic resilience is more like resistance because of its short-term effect in a situation of sudden disturbance. As a consequence, resistance without being able to adapt to changes makes the economy susceptible to collapse. Dinh et al. (2016), instead, propose the concept of *community economic resilience* which covers both concepts of stabilisation and adaptation of a community economy (a system of production, distribution, trade or consumption of goods and services within a geographical boundary (Dinh et al., 2016, p. 1220)) in response to disruptive economic changes. In general, it can be assumed that economic resilience is one of the essential economic indices providing economists and policy-makers with information necessary for making decisions ensuring sustainable economic development. In general, it can be seen from the above review of research on economic resilience that there always exist two opposing aspects in the definitions of economic resilience, including shocks or disruptive changes and adaptative responses. In other words, disruptive changes and adaptive responses are two facets of a problem and the sustainable development of an economy may not be assessed properly without taking into account interactive mechanisms of these two aspects. Such a perspective on economic resilience suggests that the conceptualisation of resilience in this study necessitates taking into account factors both enabling and compromising foreign language learning, and how foreign languge learner resilience is shaped by the interaction between the two opposing groups of factors.

The discussion above of different contexts in which the concept of resilience has been used has focused on systems whether biological (ecosystems) or human and organisational. It has argued for the conceptualisation of resilience in this study as a dynamic process characterised by interactions between the individual and aspects in the environment or between factors weakening and enhancing a system. The sections below focus on concepts in which resilience has been used in association with individuals.

2.2.5. Resilience in sports

Addressing the issue of maintaining peak performance of elite athletes in competitive sports events, Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) argue that "[withstanding] a wide range of pressures [from both sporting and non-sporting events] to attain and sustain high performance" (p. 265),

psychological resilience is almost a must for athletes. Their research study into the importance of resilience in optimal performances of Olympic champions using a grounded theory approach has helped shape a theoretical basis to understanding the role of resilience in sports (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). The results of the study indicated that psychological factors (positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus and perceived social support) influence the athletes' challenge evaluation and meta-cognition, thus protecting them from the so-called *stressors* coming from three different sources, namely competitive, organisational, and personal issues (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). These psychological factors are also claimed to "promote facilitative responses that precede optimal sport performance" (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 672).

It is also interesting to note that while researchers tend to view resilience as either a trait or a process, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) developed the theory of sports resilience from both perspectives. They argue that *positive personality, confidence* and *focus* can be considered as personal factors, but resilience in Olympic champions should be studied within the context of the stress process in which "psychological factors (relating to positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus, and perceived social support) interact [with the context] to influence the stress-resilience-performance relationship" (p. 675). Consequently, they define resilience as "the role of mental processes and behaviour in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors" (p. 675). In addition to the conceptualisation of psychological resilience in Olympic champions, Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) discovered that it is also necessary to identify proper measures of sport resilience. They conclude that in order to assess resilience, it is important to account for and measure adversity, positive adaptation and protective factors. It can be inferred that by acknowledging the role of protective factors in measuring sport resilience, Sarkar and Fletcher (2013) have also affirmed the existence of protective factors alongside risk factors (stressors) in their conceptualisation of sport resilience. This aligns with the typical model of resilience which often include two counteractive components – risk factors and protective factors (See for example Luthar, 2006; Werner, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992). In essence, it can be said that personal psychological and contextual factors are key components of sport resilience as conceptualised by Fletcher and Sarkar (2012, 2013) and Sarkar and Fletcher (2013), and might be useful for studying resilience in language learners.

2.2.6. Educational/academic resilience

Although the educational environment is often considered supportive for an individual's development, success in this environment is likely to be jeopardised by adverse circumstances

and conditions. It is thus believed that academic success in the presence of adversity requires resilience, often referred to as *educational resilience* or *academic resilience*. Wang, Haertal, and Walberg (1997) define educational resilience as "the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (p. 4). Martin and Marsh (2003) seem more context-specific in their definition as they put it that "in the academic context, [resilience] is defined as students' ability to deal effectively with academic setbacks, stress, and study pressure" (p. 2).

Most research into educational resilience has focused on examining why some students perform successfully at schools while others, under the same disadvantaged socioeconomic status or adverse circumstances, do not (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). For example, Phan (2003) investigated the academic resilience of Vietnamese-Canadian young people who had experienced hardship in their lives as refugees. Their research revealed that while most Vietnamese-Canadian youths suffered from racial discrimination at schools, they showed their determination in overcoming hardship to attain scholarships for academic education. It is also interesting to note that the participants not only demonstrated their resilience through their efforts, determination and positive attitudes but they seemed to internalise racism as motivation to push their way through adversity and succeed (Phan, 2003)

In the more specific context of mathematical education, the concept of mathematical resilience has also been studied in order to help students become confident to "solve problems, engage in discussion and practical work, gain experience of more complex situations and explore meaningfulness" when facing mathematical challenges (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2010b, p. 38). According to Johnston-Wilder and Lee (2010a, 2010b) much has been found in the literature showing that many people find mathematics difficult and show anxiety studying it. They argue that current mathematics teaching practices which emphasise preparing learners for tests and equipping learners with a good memory of mathematical formulae and quick solutions to mathematical problems can be considered "a form of cognitive abuse" (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2010b, p. 39). This has caused learners to suffer from fear of mathematics or mathematics learning (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, Lee and Johnston-Wilder (2017) claim that learners' negative attitudes towards mathematics such as "mathematics anxiety, avoidance, learned helplessness, and exclusion" (p. 271) have been a prevailing phenomenon in the UK and many other countries, and thus developing mathematical resilience is essential for reducing these negative aspects in learning mathematics. Accordingly, mathematical resilience is defined as a "positive adaptive stance to mathematics" (Johnston-Wilder & Lee, 2010a, p. 2) which helps learners continue learning mathematics despite

difficulties. It is apparent that their conceptualisation of the construct of mathematical resilience has made a significant contribution to the literature on resilience research. However, it is worth noting that while they claim risk factors are rooted mostly in the mathematics classroom culture, they conclude that mathematical resilience is shaped from such factors as *value*, *struggle*, and *growth* which they interpret respectively as the belief in mathematics as a valuable subject worth studying, recognition of the universality in struggling with mathematics, and belief or confidence that the ability to develop mathematical skills is limited to no one (See Johnston-Wilder, Lee, Garton, Goodlad, & Brindley, 2013; Lee & Johnston-Wilder, 2017). It seems that while the above factors likely to be seen as individual or personal aspects are covered, social factors that might be attributable to mathematical resilience are not included in their conceptualisation. The above research studies into academic/educational resilience confirm the significance of resilience in educational contexts. They provide an overview of possible contextual and individual factors influencing the learning process of an individual. However, resilience in these studies appears to be individualistic while, as argued in the previous sections, it should be seen as a relational concept. This appears to be a gap that this study will possibly fill.

In sum, an overview of the literature on multidisciplinary research into the concept of resilience indicates its significance in various societal aspects. Therefore, the conceptualisation of resilience in the context of foreign language learning is not only likely to make a contribution to the literature in the psychological mainstream research but also to compose a framework which may well lead to better support for learners of foreign and second languages.

2.3. Resilience in foreign/second language learning

Although resilience is not a new construct in many fields of study, it seems relatively underexplored in the field of foreign/second language education (Kamali & Fahim, 2011). Indeed, a search on Google scholar of the phrase "resilience in language learning" shows a limited number of scholarly articles on resilience in foreign/second language teaching and learning. According to Oxford et al. (2007), "resiliency is vibrant, recognized research field not yet discovered by L2 researchers" (p.132). While Oxford et al.'s comment was made over a decade ago, recently this claim has been reiterated. Kajabadi et al. (2016) claim that "resilience is a new subject in the realm of teaching and learning second language" (p.163). Similar observations have also been made by Kim and Kim (2017); Kim et al. (2018, 2019). For example, Kim and Kim (2017) comment that despite the prospect of resilience as a promising individual differences factor contributing to success in foreign language learning,

researching it has been receiving the attention of very few researchers of whom Kamali and Fahim (2011); Nguyen et al. (2015); Oxford et al. (2007) are representive.

Additionally, in search for literature on resilience in English language learning, one doctoral thesis located Abrams-Terry (2014) explored perceptions of the risk factors and protective factors of multinational English language learners in American high schools. Although the participants of the study were a group of English language learners, the emphasis was actually placed on the negative factors affecting the students' performance and how these international students had bounced back from the difficulties confronting them in order to succeed academically in schools in general.

Further exploration of the literature on resilience in second/foreign language learning has revealed a few more updated research studies by Kajabadi et al. (2016); Kim and Kim (2017); Kim et al. (2018, 2019); Saerom, Hiver, and Al-Hoorie (2018), which also reflect the increasing interest in exploring the potentiality this concept could bring into second/foreign language education. So far, what has been found in the studies by the above-mentioned researchers is the variation in the research contexts, aims, and approaches to the exploration of the concept. However, their studies can be divided into two broad categories based on the research contexts and participants. These include studies on international students studying foreign languages abroad and those focusing on English language learners studying English as a foreign language in their home countries.

2.3.1. Studies on international students studying foreign languages abroad

Regarding research on international students studying foreign languages abroad, the literature review indicates two groups of scholars: Oxford et al. (2007) and Nguyen et al. (2015). Oxford et al. (2007) investigate foreign language learners' crises which they describe as volatile and challenging situations where the learners experience failure, powerlessness, incompetence or absence of choice studying a second/foreign language abroad or even in language classrooms in their home countries. They propose that self-determination, autonomy and resilience are essential factors synergistically contributing to an individual's transcending an L2 crisis and regaining learning momentum. Using narrative as the major research approach, the findings draw on their interpretation of stories from four learners and confirm that self-determination (displayed through the learners' relatedness, autonomy, intrinsic motivation and competence) and resilience (through their problem-solving skills, goal setting, and attitude) helped the learners overcome their crises and sustain their language learning. What was interesting in their

research was the severity of the crises that seemed to have boosted the learners' self-determination and resilience. Although the direct focus of this research was not resilience, Oxford and her associates touched upon the concept of resilience through examining its antecedents – L2 crises, and asserted the role of resilience in foreign language learning. In other words, Oxford et al. (2007) investigated one aspect of the two-sided concept of resilience in foreign language learning – the risk factors which they believe are crucial to be successful language learners. More specifically, Oxford et al. (2007) seemed to focus on the severity of the risk factors and tended to claim that the students displayed resilience and self-determination only when crises seriously affected their learning. It is also worth noticing that while Oxford et al. (2007) mentioned resilience as one of the responses to adversity in addition to other constructs in foreign language learning, they used the term "resiliency" which is often referred to as an individual's personality characteristic.

While Oxford et al. (2007) explored the L2 crises which contributed to the conceptual clarification of resilience in foreign language learning, Nguyen et al. (2015) examined resilience in language learners and its relationship to story-telling. Drawing on findings of previous studies on story-telling, Nguyen et al. (2015) argued that story-telling promotes factors conducive for the development of an individual and contributes to developing the capacity to withstand challenges or difficulties in everyday life or educational settings. A mixed-method non-experimental research design was used to explore the relationship between the learners' experiences of story-telling and resilience. In particular, they used a six-point Likert scale, called the *brief resilience scale* (BRS) developed by Smith et al. (2008). The scale was developed to assess resilience in its most basic meaning - the ability to bounce back and recover from stress and was argued to be unique because it is related to health and focuses on resilience itself, not the supportive factors contributing to resilience as other resilience scales do (Smith et al., 2008). To measure the participants' story-telling experiences, Nguyen et al. (2015) used a story-telling self-report survey developed by the researchers themselves drawing on their previous studies. The survey includes three parts of which the first part explores the participants' childhood experiences of story-telling; the second part focuses on the participants' adulthood experiences of using story-telling for educational purposes; and the last part seeks to identify the possible impacts of story-telling on resilience. Correlation and multiple linear regression analyses were then used to establish the relationship between resilience and story-telling experiences. Findings from the quantitative data indicated a significant relationship between story-telling and resilience. In the later stage, semi-structured interviews were used to further explore the influence of story-telling on resilience. Qualitative results from interviews

indicated social competence, problem solving, autonomy, sense of purpose, and use of story-telling as five traits attributed to their resilience which helped them cope with challenges in learning a second language in a foreign country. Nguyen et al.'s (2015) research has identified story-telling as another factor in the list of protective factors that help promote resilience for foreign language learners.

2.3.2. Studies on students studying English as a foreign language in their home countries

The review of literature also indicates Kajabadi et al. (2016); Kamali and Fahim (2011); Kim and Kim (2017); Kim et al. (2017, 2018, 2019) whose studies focused on learners of English as a foreign language in their home countries. As these studies sought to establish a relationship between two or three factors – one being resilience, they needed to clearly conceptualise the construct of resilience and operationalise it.

For example, Kamali and Fahim (2011) explored the relationship between the critical thinking ability of Iranian EFL learners and their resilience level facing unfamiliar vocabulary items in reading; whereas, Kajabadi et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between EFL learners' resilience and autonomous learning among undergraduate students of Islamic Azad University majoring in English language translation. They both used the self-rating resilience scale developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). The scale consists of twenty-five items with the content synthesized and adapted from several researchers' work on resilience, relevant for measuring resilience in either normal people or those who are under clinical treatment. Each item of the scale has a 5-point-range response which varies from not true at all (0) to true nearly all of the time (4). The total score ranges from 0 to 100 which also represents the range of the level of resilience. Accordingly, the scale was employed by Kamali and Fahim (2011) and Kajabadi et al. (2016) in their studies to measure and quantify the participants' abilities to cope with challenges and bounce back from adverse situations in learning English. Kamali and Fahim (2011), via a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis, found a correlation between the participants' levels of critical thinking and resilience which also had significant impacts on the students' ability to read English texts with unfamiliar vocabulary. The results of the research study by Kajabadi et al. (2016) statistically indicate that the participants' level of resilience fluctuated in proportion to their level of autonomy. The results of the study align with those of Kamali and Fahim (2011)'s study in terms of the correlation between resilience and a construct, in this case, autonomous learning. Though the results of these studies are interesting and make a significant contribution to literature relating to resilience in language learning, it seems that resilience in these two studies was treated as a personal trait and as a one-sided and static

construct which was possessed by every one of the participants at a particular point of time – the time when their resilience was measured by Connor and Davidson's scale. These studies, however, have laid the ground for the inclusion of autonomy in the conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

The concept of resilience has drawn the interest of a group of Korean scholars who sought to establish the link between resilience, motivation and L2 proficiency in the Korean context of English learning as a foreign language. Kim and Kim (2017) investigated the impact of resilience on L2 learners' motivated behaviour and proficiency of secondary-school EFL learners in South Korea. They used a three-part questionnaire survey to collect data. In particular, Kim and Kim (2017) adopted a 26-item resilience scale adapted from Shin, Kim and Kim (2009) (as cited in Kim & Kim, 2017) and developed a 5-item scale based on Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) (as cited in Kim & Kim, 2017) to respectively explore the structural characteristics of Korean L2 learners' resilience and assess the learners' motivated behaviour in learning English. Data on the learners' English proficiency was collected from their self-reported proficiency, that is, the participants were asked to provide "their latest in-house English test scores in schools" (Kim & Kim, 2017, p. 4). Results from multiple quantitative data analyses revealed that Korean secondary-school students' resilience is composed of perceived happiness, empathy, sociability, persistence, and self-regulation. Their resilience was found significantly related to L2 motivated behaviour reflected in the high correlation coefficients between their L2 motivated behaviour and the resilience factors of which persistence showed the highest correlation coefficient. Regarding the relationship between resilience and the learners' L2 proficiency, although the results showed that the correlation coefficients between their proficiency and resilience were lower than those between their motivated behaviour and resilience, factors such as perceived happiness, persistence, and empathy had a positive impact on their English proficiency. Moreover, data analysis revealed a strong relationship between the learners' motivated behaviour and their proficiency. In essence, this study has confirmed the significant role of resilience in the foreign language learning process and achievement in that it has shown a direct influence of resilience on L2 motivated behaviour and an indirect one on L2 proficiency.

While Kim and Kim (2017) investigated the impact of resilience on motivation and proficiency of Korean secondary students, Kim et al. (2017) explored the structural relationship between L2 learning (de)motivation, resilience and L2 proficiency among Korean college students. The study recruited 869 undergraduate students from a Korean university. They participated in a

questionnaire survey consisting of four sections focusing on L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, resilience and personal information in which the first three sections included five-point Likert scale items ranging from disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The L2 learning motivation section included 39 items covering aspects such as the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, promotion, prevention, and family influence. The second section included 24 items covering negative influences from instructors, inappropriate learning environments and materials, negative attitudes toward the target language and community, and the mandatory nature of L2 learning. The section measuring resilience had 27 items adapted from Shin et al. (2009) (as cited in Kim et al., 2017). To assess the students' L2 proficiency, the participants were asked to provide their scores on the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) – a Korean standardised English proficiency test for university admission. The quantitative data was analysed using exploratory factor analysis, correlational analysis, and structural equation modelling to address the research questions which explored the components of L2 motivation, L2 demotivation, and resilience, and the relationship between these constructs and L2 proficiency of Korean college students. Quantitative data analysis indicated factors composing L2 motivation, L2 demotivation, and resilience. Noticeably, resilience was found to include *life satisfaction*, *self-composure* referred to as a sense of control over negative feelings, *communicative efficacy* - a sense of sympathy toward other people, *sociability* – the ability to maintain relationships with friends, *metacognitive adaptation* – the tendency to solve problems strategically, *strategic competence* – effective communication skills, and *realistic optimism.* Structural equation modelling analysis revealed that resilience, L2 motivation and L2 demotivation contribute to L2 proficiency. Interestingly, while resilience was found not to have a direct impact on L2 motivation, it had a direct influence on L2 demotivation, and a direct and indirect influence on L2 proficiency. Drawing on the findings, Kim et al. (2017) recommend that rather than focusing on L2 motivation, the emphasis should be placed more on resilience which is likely to contribute to reducing the L2 demotivation and increase L2 proficiency of Korean college students.

The latest research in the literature on resilience in foreign language learning using a quantitative approach is Kim et al. (2019), whose research aim is similar to that of Kim and Kim (2017) and Kim et al. (2017). This study focused on elementary learners of English in Korea, which distinguishes it from studies by Kim and Kim (2017) and Kim et al. (2017) who placed emphasis on Korean secondary and college students respectively. The study employed an 85-item questionnaire survey consisting of 28 items on resilience, 33 items on motivation, and 24 items on demotivation to collect data from 367 students in two elementary schools in

Seoul, Korea. Exploratory factor analysis revealed metacognitive adaptation, sociability, optimism, perseverance, and communicative efficacy as factors composing resilience. Regarding the relationships among resilience, (de)motivation, and proficiency, quantitative approach to data analysis produced results similar to those in Kim and Kim (2017). In particular, structural equation modelling analysis indicated the direct impact of resilience on motivation and indirect impact on L2 proficiency while revealing that both motivation and demotivation directly influenced L2 proficiency of the participants. The findings of this study differ from those in Kim et al. (2017) regarding the relationship among resilience, motivation and demotivation. Specifically, while this study found that resilience directly influenced L2 motivation of Korean elementary students, the Kim et al. (2017) study did not identify any statistically significant influence of resilience on Korean college students' L2 motivation. As a consequence, Kim et al. (2019) suggest that promoting resilience should be taken into account to maintain motivation for elementary students to overcome demotivational factors in learning English. The findings of this study reiterate the important role of resilience in the Korean context of English language learning.

It is worth noting that these studies have identified the factors composing resilience in the Korean context of English learning as a foreign language, contributing to the clarification of the concept in the field of second language acquisition. The findings have also indicated the impact resilience had on the foreign language learning process and achievement, reflecting the relationship between resilience and other constructs widely known as influential for second/foreign language learning such as motivation and demotivation. However, it is also important to note that while the findings of these studies tend to reflect the dynamism and nonlinear interaction between various factors composing resilience, motivation and demotivation, the researchers' perspective on resilience appears to concur with that of Kamali and Fahim (2011) and Kajabadi et al. (2016) who tend to view resilience as a trait composed of measurable factors.

2.3.3. A qualitative study on resilience in learning English as a foreign language

Claiming that previous studies on resilience in foreign language learning over-relied on the resilience questionnaire items initially developed in psychology and psychiatry, Kim et al. (2018) conducted qualitative research to explore the components influencing Korean primary and secondary EFL students' resilience. Interviews were used as the main data collection method. Nine teachers were interviewed in a pilot study to collect information about their school environment and their perspectives on the components of resilience in learning English

as a foreign language. They were then asked to recommend two low-proficiency and two high-proficiency students for interviews in the main study. Data from interviews with nine teachers and 23 EFL students coming from an elementary school, a junior high school, and a high school revealed both negative and positive aspects contributing to shaping the participants' resilience in learning English. More specifically, the findings revealed EFL teachers' unclear explanations, *hagwon* (private extra classes), and pressure from memorising vocabulary and grammar as demotivators/stressors to Korean EFL students from different educational levels while social support, emotional regulation, a clear learning goal and tenacity in learning English were identified as components of the student participants' resilience in learning English. This study has provided a more holistic view on resilience in foreign language learning than the above-mentioned as it has been able to unearth the adversity aspect while exploring the components of resilience drawing on the student participants' verbatim responses. The study has tapped into the dynamism and the temporal aspect of the concept of resilience. These aspects reflected in the differing perspectives of the students from different levels of education on the challenges that triggered their resilience and the cultivation of specific resilience components as they advanced academically. For example, while Korean elementary students tended to be demotivated by the teachers' unclear explanations and were stressed at being asked to speak English in class, junior high school and high school students appeared to be more stressed by the *hagwons* and vocabulary and grammar oriented teaching. Or concerning the students' emotional regulation, the higher the level of education the students were at, the more pressure they suffered from learning English. More importantly, the study has taken the contextual factors into account as it identified emotional and academic support from families and teachers as integral in promoting their resilience. This implies the interactive mechanism between the contextual factors and the individual factors making resilience a dynamic concept. Although the study has provided a more dynamic view on resilience in foreign language learning and exploited the contextual factors in relation to some internal factors conducive to the learning process, its findings regarding the challenges were limited to those derived from the school environment, failing to identify other challenges and difficulties that could have emerged from other contexts throughout the participants' learning trajectories. Accordingly, the view of resilience in this study is likely to fall back to the resilience-as-an-outcome perspective because resilience was seen as the result of successfully overcoming challenges from the classroom environment.

2.3.4. Academic buoyancy in foreign language learning

Another attempt has also been made to explore learners' everyday resilience in the language classroom by Saerom et al. (2018). Although the term *resilience* was mentioned in the title of the study, Saerom et al. (2018) chose to use the term *academic buoyancy* to refer to the foreign language learners' ability to withstand setbacks, challenges and pressures in the school environment. Their justification for using this term instead of resilience was based on Martin and Marsh's (2008) conceptualisation of academic buoyancy. According to Martin and Marsh (2008), academic buoyancy differs from resilience in the degree and type of adversity. In particular, while the traditional resilience concept tends to focus on individuals exposed to more acute and chronic adversity that may lead to maladaptive development, academic buoyancy is seen as "everyday" academic resilience which addresses those who experience ordinary school life pressures or a lack of motivation or engagement emerging from poor grades, poor performance or negative feedback from schoolwork. Therefore, Martin and Marsh (2008) believe that the concept of academic buoyancy can be applied to a wider population than that of resilience, which addresses fewer cases. In this light, Saerom et al. (2018) embarked on testing the relevance of academic buoyancy in the context of foreign language learning in Korea. They developed a questionnaire consisting of six-point Likert scale items adapted from existing measures of six constructs, viz. self-efficacy, self-regulation, ideal L2 self, persistence, teacher-student relationship, and anxiety. Mokken scale analysis was conducted to ensure the unidimensionality and the validity of the items. Persistence was left out in the final version of the questionnaire as the Mokken scale analysis indicated no discriminant validity between buoyancy and persistence; that is, persistence was found to not be related to buoyancy. Data was collected from 787 college-level students from six universities in Seoul, Korea. Also, the participants' L2 achievement and academic achievement were assessed via their standardised L2 scores and grade point average (GPA). The quantitative approach to data analysis using multiple methods supported the hypothesis that academic buoyancy exists in the domain of foreign language learning. In particular, the results from cluster analysis revealed five learner profiles, viz. the *thriver*, *engaged, striver*, *dependent*, and the *disengaged* while SEM results indicated self-efficacy, strategic self-regulation, and ideal L2 self as three significant predictors of academic buoyancy. Anxiety and teacher-student interaction were found not significant in predicting academic buoyancy. Further analysis of the data indicated that academic buoyancy strongly predicted L2 achievement and general academic achievement. Subsequently, Saerom et al. (2018) concluded that their findings aligned with previous studies and that academic

buoyancy had a positive influence on foreign language learning in terms of sustaining L2 motivation and predicting L2 achievement.

Although the research examined the concept of academic buoyancy developed by Martin and Marsh (2008), it actually investigated one aspect of the multidimensional concept of resilience by setting a boundary for the notion of adversity. Saerom et al. (2018) reiterate the essential role of resilience in the process of foreign language learning when commenting "buoyancy sustains motivation thereby providing learners with the capacity to negotiate ups and downs in everyday language learning, sustain prolonged effort, and overcome setbacks on the path to L2 learning success" (p. 2).

Thus far, the above comprehensive review of seven research studies on resilience in foreign language learning has shown an increasing interest in researching the concept in the field of second language acquisition. Although resilience has been conceptualised differently depending on the purposes and the contexts in which it was examined, these studies concur in that resilience has emerged as an indispensable concept contributing to successful second/foreign language learning. However, most, if not all, of the studies above tend to see resilience as a static characteristic possessed by groups of people because by the time these researchers used scales to measure resilience or factors composing it, they had inadvertently detached the participants from their contexts and had captured a slice when the scale was administered. As a consequence, they failed to take into account the contextual and temporal aspects of resilience whereas the concept should be seen as a process which fluctuates according to different times and spaces across an individual's lifespan (e.g. Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Furthermore, while risks and protective factors are often considered as two sides of the same coin in conceptualising resilience (See e.g. Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001), the findings of the studies reviewed above, except for those of Kim et al. (2018), tend to put more emphasis on the dispositional characteristics of the individuals without delineating the interactions between the protective factors and the adversities leading to resilience.

Despite the limited number of research studies on resilience in foreign language learning, the aforementioned studies have partly explained how this powerful concept has contributed to understanding foreign language learning achievement in different contexts. However as mentioned above, in the conceptualisation of resilience, most studies in the field seem to rely too much on pre-developed scales in psychology, detaching the learners from the learning process and contexts where learning takes place. Such a uni-directional view decontextualises resilience, making it a static concept instead of a contextually nuanced one. Given the

explanatory power of resilience in foreign language learning success and the gaps regarding the conceptualisation of foreign language learning resilience in the above-mentioned studies, further exploration of this concept in the Vietnamese contexts of English language education will contribute to the clarification of the concept in foreign/second language education.

2.3.5. Teacher resilience in the context of foreign language education

Although the learners are the main focus of this study, effective teaching practice is vital to students' positive learning outcomes, for the teacher-students relationship is inherently reciprocal. In this light, teacher resilience must be taken into account as teachers' ability to maintain productive practices in the presence of emerging challenges and difficulties would seem to contribute to enabling learner resilience. Indeed, the interrelationship between teacher resilience and learner resilience has been recognised when Middleton (2020) argues that "teachers are critical in supporting the well-being and resilience of learners, and . . . supporting teacher resilience [is] something of high importance" (p. 124). While Middleton's argument emphasises resilience for special education and disability practitioners, a perspective on the interrelationship between teacher resilience and learner resilience can apply in other educational contexts because maintaining positive educational outcomes, seen at least partly in learners' success, is a teacher goal and "to teach at one's best over time has always required resilience" (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 22). Furthermore, to account for L2 language teachers' well-being and also as a response to Mercer, Oberdorfer, and Saleem's (2016) call for attention to teachers' positive psychology, Hiver (2018) argues for the conceptualisation of L2 teacher resilience as a dynamic relational process where twenty-first-century L2 teachers cope with challenges from the social and professional contexts to ensure their professional commitment and productivity. As a consequence, it can be argued that when L2 teachers function effectively and productively in their profession, they help mitigate challenges and difficulties confronting L2 learners in their learning process. In other words, L2 teacher resilience is likely to contribute to shaping foreign language learner resilience, which enables foreign language learners to sustain or succeed in learning in the face of adversity.

2.4. Factors affecting success in second language acquisition

The above review of previous studies on resilience in foreign language learning and teaching has also revealed the relationship between resilience and a number of individual factors which has long been claimed by SLA researchers as affecting second language acquisition. This section presents a review of the individual factors influencing SLA. It aims to further relate

these factors to the concept of resilience to facilitate the conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience.

Success in learning a second language has been claimed to be influenced by various factors which have been unearthed by scholars in second language acquisition since its establishment of a field of inquiry. These factors range from internal to external factors dependent on the perspectives on whether acquiring a second language is a cognitive or a social process (See for example Ellis, 2008b; Ortega, 2009). To situate this current study in an SLA research context and identify the conceptual gap the study is likely to bridge, this section will review the literature on factors influencing second language acquisition.

Although resilience and second language acquisition appear as two different research domains, research findings in these two domains concur in the individual factors influencing individual success. While motivation, autonomy or self-esteem/self-efficacy, a sense of purpose, and emotional sensitivity are among the individual factors that appear highly consistent in resilience research (See for example Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001; Waxman et al., 2003; Werner, 1997), these factors have also been well researched in SLA. They are often referred to as *individual learner differences* and assumed to account for the extent to which an individual succeeds in learning a foreign/second language (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a). Taking into account the individual differences factors in the examination of resilience has become more relevant when Oxford emphasised how resilience plays a role in promoting L2 learner autonomy and shifting learners' emotions that contribute to their language learning process (Oxford, 2015a, 2015b). In discussing aspects related to autonomous language learners, Oxford (2015a) affirms that resilience is indispensable for shaping learner autonomy. Similarly, in her discussion of the role of emotions in second language learning, Oxford (2015b) states that resilience is essential "in times of emotional, cognitive, and/or physical stress" (p. 2). In addition to social factors such as "compassionate relationships, opportunities for responsible participation, and the ability to enlist social support" (Oxford, 2015a, p. 61), individual factors such as "persistence, hardiness, problem-solving, self-esteem, goal-directedness, sense of anticipation, sense of purpose, and sense of coherence" (Oxford, 2015b, p. 2), reiterated by resilience researchers, were cited as determinants for resilient language learners.

In light of the above and within the scope of this study, this section focuses on reviewing the individual factors, including motivation, autonomy, agency, and emotion. While the selection of motivation, autonomy, and emotion for this review is justified above, agency was selected owing to my personal speculation drawing on Oxford et al. (2007) and Van Lier (2008) who

respectively stated that "surmounting a crisis involves regaining or developing agency" (p. 132) and "successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner" (p.163). These comments signify that agency can also contribute to accounting for resilience in foreign language learning.

2.4.1. Motivation

Motivation has been listed as a key factor for second language (L2) learners' success (Brown, 2014; Le, 2014). It is claimed that the more motivated the learner is, the more time and effort he/she will exert on learning a second language (Spolsky, as cited in Le, 2014). Dornyei (2005) asserted:

> Motivation is of great importance in second language acquisition (SLA): it provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all other factors involved in SLA presuppose motivation to some extent" (p. 65).

Thus, it would seem inadequate to study resilience in foreign language learning without mentioning the significance of motivation which for almost 50 years has been affirmed by numerous scholars and researchers as one of the most influential factors affecting the process of language learning.

L2 motivation has developed as an independent research field since 1959, initiated by the work of Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert. L2 motivation research, therefore, has undergone a substantial history of development with three distinctive main phrases, namely social-psychological, cognitive-situated, and process-oriented periods (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Characterised by Gardner and Lambert's theory on motivation, which placed the emphasis on social context and attitudes toward L2 and L2 community, the social-psychological period witnessed the genesis of such concepts as integrative orientation and instrumental orientation, often referred to as the momentum for motivation in learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). While the former refers to the positive disposition of an individual to learn a language and integrate himself/herself into its community and culture, the latter refers to the desire to learn a language to serve some practical objectives such as finding a good job or getting higher salary (Gardner, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The cognitive-situated period, however, shifted its focus onto learners' cognitive aspects and their learning contexts to understand L2 motivation. This was partly because these researchers believed that attitudes toward L2 and L2 communities had little significance for classroom aspects of learning such as the learners'

needs, the curriculum, the syllabus and the teacher's role (Guerrero, 2015). As a consequence, research into L2 motivation was "explicitly grounded in the classroom setting" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 49). Nonetheless, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) claim that in this period L2 motivation frameworks and theories such as Dornyei's three-level model of L2 motivation, William and Burden's framework of L2 motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997), Deci and Ryan's self–determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) or Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner, 1986) were, in fact, an expansion of the perspectives on L2 motivation developed previously. The process-oriented period focused on the temporal aspect of L2 motivation due to the belief that "student motivation does not remain constant during the course of learning" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 60). Researchers representative of the temporal dimension of L2 motivation include Williams and Burden who describe the evolution of L2 motivation through initiating and sustaining phases, Ushioda with the temporal perspective of L2 motivation including learning experiences and learner's future goals, and Dörnyei and Otto with the process model of L2 motivation consisting of pre-actional, actional and post-actional phases (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Despite a substantial history with the flourishing of different models, these theoretical models, including the most recent process-oriented models of L2 motivation, are subject to critique. They are criticised for their causal linear view of L2 motivation, failing to capture the different identities of language learners and the complexity of the interrelationship of motivation factors occurring over time (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) or even in single lessons (Pawlak, 2012).

Taking into account the drawbacks of the linear view of L2 motivation, socio-dynamic perspectives toward research into L2 motivation have emerged delineating the dynamic and temporal aspects of L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Specifically, three approaches to L2 motivation recently proposed by Dornyei and Ushioda include the person-in-context relational view of motivation, the L2 motivational self-system, and the complex dynamic system view of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Seen from these angles, it appears to be more relevant to relate the concept of motivation with resilience in foreign language learning, given that resilience, by definition, is a developmental dynamic process of interactions between risk and protective factors. In response to the need for describing the temporal and dynamic features of L2 motivation, Dörnyei (2005) proposes the concept of an L2 motivational self system taking into account the concept *integrativeness* introduced by Gardner and Lambert and concept of *self* developed by Markus and Nurius (Pawlak, 2012). The three-dimensional L2 motivational self system, including the *ideal L2 self,* the *ought-to L2 self* and the *L2 learning* experience is meant to be "compatible with the process-oriented understanding of motivation,

as the three components are believed to evolve all the time" (Pawlak, 2012, p. 252). Additionally, the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self, respectively defined as: "the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves" to master language, and the characteristics "one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 86), can be seen as protective factors that help support language learners in coping with adverse circumstances. In the same vein, Ushioda (2009) argues that motivation takes its shape from the interaction between different identities language learners take at various times during their learning process and particular socio-cultural and historical contexts which evolve over time. Motivation, thus, is being sustained and can counteract the crises that learners encounter in their language learning.

In essence, it would be a short-coming to discuss resilience as a factor affecting language learners' success without mentioning the significance of motivation in foreign language learning and attempting to reconcile it with resilience to some extent. More importantly, it seems relevant to take the socio-dynamic perspective into account in discussing the relationship between motivation and the concept of resilience as both concepts are temporal and dynamic by nature. It is also important to note the difference -- that while resilience is often triggered by antecedents, motivation, like agency does not require antecedents in order to be activated.

2.4.2. Emotion

It is believed that emotion is central to human behaviours. Although *emotion* has not been discussed explicitly in psychological resilience research, "achieving emotional health" (Anthony, as cited in Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 7) or making use of the sense of humour as one strategy to turn one's emotionality from negative to positive or to withstand negative emotional experiences (Masten, as cited in Benard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992) are included in the characteristics of resilient children. Additionally, Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), in arguing for the role of emotions in psychological resilience, assert that "positive emotionality . . . emerges as an important element of psychological resilience" (p. 2). Their research draws on the broaden-and-build theory which states positive emotions such as "joy, interest, contentment, love and pride . . . all share the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 219). Their research findings indicate that "positive emotions contribute to the ability for resilient individuals to physiologically recover from negative emotional arousal" and individuals with positive emotions during stressful times are driven to "pursue novel and creative thoughts and actions"

(Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004, pp. 20-21). Furthermore, the importance of emotion has been acknowledged by many scholars in the realm of language learning and teaching (Bown & White, 2010). Bown and White's (2010) qualitative research into affective factors in an individualised instruction language programme revealed that language learners' success was influenced by a panoply of emotions, both negative and positive. The students in their study were reported to have struggled against the effects of negative emotions in order to maintain their motivation and inspiration in language learning.

Oxford (2015b) claims to have found a wide variety of personal emotions through her research in second and foreign language learners' histories, including not only negative emotions such as "anger, shame, guilt, self-disgust and anxiety" but highly positive emotions as well, for example, "confidence, love, pleasure, pride, contentment, and joy" (p. 1). She further affirms that "certain learners' histories also revealed [their] ability to shift resiliently from negative emotions to positive ones" (Oxford, 2015b, p. 1) and "resilient individuals probably have a significant degree of emotional intelligence" (Oxford, 2015b, p. 3). Drawing on a series of theories including resilience theory, emotional intelligence theory, well-being theory in positive psychology, the theory of flow, emotion theory in existential psychotherapy, and psychospiritual concepts of emotion, Oxford (2015b) has also argued for the significance of emotions and the application of these theories in second language learning. In research studies based on emotion theories by Oxford and her associates in 2014, it was shown that L2 language learners often experience a range of emotions in their language learning process and once negative emotions are surpassed by positive emotions, language learners take more initiative and become motivated to overcome difficulties in their learning (Oxford, 2015b). It can be inferred that if negative emotions are viewed as obstacles preventing language learners from sustaining their learning, finding resources to regain positive emotions in language learning could be considered one of the resilient responses in learning a foreign language. However, it would not be persuasive enough to assert that negative emotions totally hinder the development of second/foreign language learning. Some research studies into language anxiety – one of the emotional factors in second language acquisition – have suggested that "not all anxiety is negative" and that anxiety, as a multidimensional concept, "could be either detrimental or conducive to language learning" (Imai, 2010, p. 279). Imai's research further suggests that "even emotions supposedly detrimental to an individual's learning, such as boredom and frustration, could become a psychological resource for development" (Imai, 2010, p. 288). Viewing emotions as being socially constructed through interpersonal communication that mediates learning and development, Imai suggests moving beyond the dichotomy of negative

and positive emotions in L2 acquisition when considering learning as "a fundamentally interpersonal transaction" (Imai, 2010, p. 288). In general, emotion is an inseparable element in studying human behaviours. Given that resilience in foreign language learning is a developmental process demonstrated through learners' behaviours in response to difficulties in their learning contexts, it is of great significance to take into account the concept of emotion in exploring the process of resilience in language learning.

2.4.3. Autonomy

The concept of autonomy has been mentioned as an ultimate goal to achieve in education (Benson, 2001, 2009; Waterhouse, 1990 in Dang, 2010). In the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching, learner autonomy has become a "buzzword" (Little, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2000) and received much international research attention for the past three decades (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). According to Benson (2011b), a consensus has been reached among scholars that "language learners naturally tend to take control of their learning, learners who lack control are capable of developing it, and autonomous language learning is more effective than non-autonomous language learning" (p.16). Benson's focus is on the individual. In contrast, from the perspective of complexity theory, Tatzl (2016) considers the individual in a complex socio-cultural context. He describes learner autonomy as a dynamic system which develops through interactions and relationships of an individual with "significant others" (p. 41) and his/her learning environment. In arguing for the diversity of learner autonomy, Tatzl (2016) puts it that autonomous learners are flexible in terms of being able to adjust to changes "without losing sight of their learning goals" (p. 41). He affirms that "highly autonomous learners will still actively seek out learning opportunities even in adverse circumstances, thus attempting to increase their knowledge and skills and fulfil their potential" (p. 41). It can be inferred that in this proposition, there is a correlation between resilience and autonomous language learning. The relationship between learner autonomy and resilience in language learning can also be reaffirmed from the claim made by Oxford (2015a) that "learner autonomy involves some degree of resilience" (p. 61).

2.4.4. Agency

According to van Lier (2008), "successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner" (p. 163). Originating from sociology, the term *agency* has been viewed as a slippery notion that has initiated debates among scholars of different disciplines in defining it (Ahearn, 2001; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). Ahearn (2001)

defines agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p.112). From the perspective of social psychology, Brown (2014) delineates agency as "an individual capacity for self-awareness and self-determination" (p. 102) which includes the ability to make decisions, enact or resist change, and take charge of one's own actions. Hunter and Cooke (2007) argue that learners act in various ways, showing their agency "or the capacity to act with initiative and effect" (p. 75) for the purpose of their own learning. Hunter's study on transnational migrant employment revealed that migrant employees with problems in communicating in English at the workplace in New Zealand made use of their agentic actions to adapt themselves in the working environment in New Zealand (Hunter, 2012). If language is an obstacle that keeps an individual away from their desire to emerge in a new environment, which can certainly be called a difficult situation, then making one's own way out of the situation using their agentic resources can be seen as a manifestation of resilience. This perspective is also reflected in a study by Oxford et al. (2007) who mentioned the role of agency in discussing second language learning crises as follows: [C]rises are situations in which we feel powerless and believe we have no effect or choice, that is, we lack a sense of agency and autonomy, and surmounting a crisis involves regaining or developing agency and autonomy. (p. 132)

It could be argued from the above that there is a relationship between the two constructs and that for language learning resilience to evolve, foreign/second language learners must develop the ability to act on their own and take the initiative in their learning. Although it seems paradoxical to link the two concepts due to the fact that while resilience is a dynamic process which requires ongoing interaction between the risk factors and protective factors, agency does not always require antecedents - obstacles to be overcome. However, from the perspective of complexity theory, Mercer (2012) argues that if viewed as a dynamic complex system, agency is also considered as "temporally situated connecting together the dynamics of a person's ongoing life history" (p.57). It could also be argued that as long as language learners' agency – capacity to act -- is sustained, their resilience in language learning will grow.

2.5. A complex dynamic systems theory perspective on foreign language learner resilience

The above review of the literature on resilience and individual factors in second/foreign language learning has shown that both resilience and foreign language learning are developmental processes that involve the interactions of different factors. The following sections argue for the relevance of conceptualising foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system and taking a *Complex Dynamic Systems Theory* (CDST) perspective in exploring it.

2.5.1. An overview of complex dynamic systems theory

CDST was in an embryonic state when Larsen-Freeman (1997) made an effort to "call attention to the similarities among complex non-linear systems in nature and language and language acquisition" (p. 142). Drawing on a perspective of Chaos/Complexity theory in physics, Larsen-Freeman (1997) argues that both language and second language acquisition are complex dynamic systems as they bear in them features characterising complex systems. The theory is actually labelled differently by SLA scholars, for example, complexity theory (CT) (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b), dynamic system theory (DST) (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007), or emergentism (Ellis, 1998). Despite this variation, advocates of the theory concur in describing the process of second language acquisition/development as a complex dynamic system with characteristics such as dynamism, complexity, nonlinearity, chaos, unpredictability, initial-condition sensitivity, self-organisation, openness to change, feedback sensitivity, and adaptiveness. The unifying label of CDST derives as a combination of complexity theory and dynamic systems theory because the theories focus on two fundamental characteristics of complex dynamic systems (De Bot, 2017). In particular, while the interconnectedness of the components within a system is the focus of complexity theory, dynamism is the major emphasis in dynamic systems theory (Gillies, 2014).

In general, a complex dynamic system is often described as being composed of at least two or more interrelated components which change over time leading to the constant state of flux of the system (Dörnyei, 2011; Mercer, 2013). For example, Mercer (2013) states that "a complex dynamic system consists of at least two, but usually a multitude of, interrelated components which may themselves be complex systems" (p. 377). Tatzl (2016) further explains that a complex system only comes into being under the interrelations and character emerging from the interactions of multiple components. Accordingly, the complete interconnectedness of the components and non-linear interaction leading to the dynamism and unpredictability of the system are the dominant features of a complex dynamic system (See e.g. De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011; De Bot et al., 2007; Dörnyei, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008a).

Second language acquisition/development from the CDST perspective can be described as nested systems of individual cognitive processes and the socio-cultural contexts where language acquisition/learning occurs. To elaborate, second language acquisition/development involves the multiple sub-systems of internal (cognitive) factors and external (sociocultural) factors interacting with each other. Once there is a change in any of the sub-systems, the whole system

will transform into another state. For example, a foreign language classroom is a system, and as such it consists of such sub-systems as the teacher's and students' behaviours and attitudes, the curriculum, syllabus, learning/teaching materials, the facilities and the environment. All of these sub-systems are interconnected and a change in a sub-system - the teacher's attitude, for instance - will predictably entail changes in other sub-systems and the whole language classroom.

2.5.2. A systematic view of resilience in second/foreign language learning

As aforementioned, both resilience and foreign language learning are seen as developmental processes that involve the interactions of different factors. The combination of these two developmental processes can generate a complex dynamic system. While resilience, by itself, can be seen as a complex system which includes the interactions among contextual and individual factors embedded in the overarching interaction between risk and protective factors, the process of second/foreign language learning can also be seen as another complex system, involving the interplay between individual learner factors and those from the environment. As such, it can be proposed that foreign language learner resilience be seen as a complex dynamic system because it is composed of resilience and foreign language learning as its two complex sub-systems. In other words, the phenomenon of resilience in foreign language learning can be viewed as nested systems within the complex systems of foreign language learning.

Such a perspective can be strengthened by integrating the perspectives of scholars in resilience and SLA research. For example, while Rigsby (1994) states "resilience is the response to a complex set of interactions involving person, social context, and opportunities" (p. 89), ahmed Shafi et al. (2020) call for a dynamic interactive model of resilience, and Larsen-Freeman (2011) in her suggestion for a complexity theory approach to second language development/acquisition, states:

> Language, its use, its evolution, its development, its learning and its teaching are arguably complex systems. Thus, complexity theory offers a way to unite all the phenomena. Complexity can therefore be tapped for its useful perspective on dynamic phenomena such as L2 development (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 52).

It can be argued that foreign language learner resilience qualifies as a complex dynamic system because it satisfies the conditions of a complex dynamic system. Firstly, it is made up of various factors influencing both resilience and foreign language learning sub-systems. Secondly, these factors are closely intertwined. Once there is a fluctuation in a single factor of a subsystem,

foreign language learner resilience varies accordingly, making the system dynamic. Thirdly, as both resilience and foreign language learning are seen as developmental processes, the temporal aspect is another important criterion for resilience in foreign language learning to be seen as a complex dynamic system.

Given that foreign language learner resilience can be seen as a complex dynamic system, taking a CDST perspective is appropriate for exploring it because the theory takes into account characteristics featuring a complex dynamic system as presented above.

2.5.3. A working definition of foreign language learner resilience

One of the planned outcomes of this research is to provide a conceptualisation of the little researched concept of resilience in foreign language learning. It has thus been necessary to evaluate what existing research suggests a definition or emerging conceptualisation might look like. To this end, I would like present this here and include a visual representation (Figure 2.1 below).

Given that foreign language learning is viewed as a complex system involving both sociocultural and psychological subsystems and successful language learning depends on the language learner's autonomous learning, agentic actions, positive emotion and motivation as argued above, foreign language learner resilience might be defined as a dynamic but sustained developmental process of adaptation of the language learner in response to the on-going interactions of counteractive factors emerging from the socio-cultural contexts where language learning occurs, that is, resilience is a dynamic system, composed of subsystems of contextual factors and psychological factors interwoven during the language learning process.

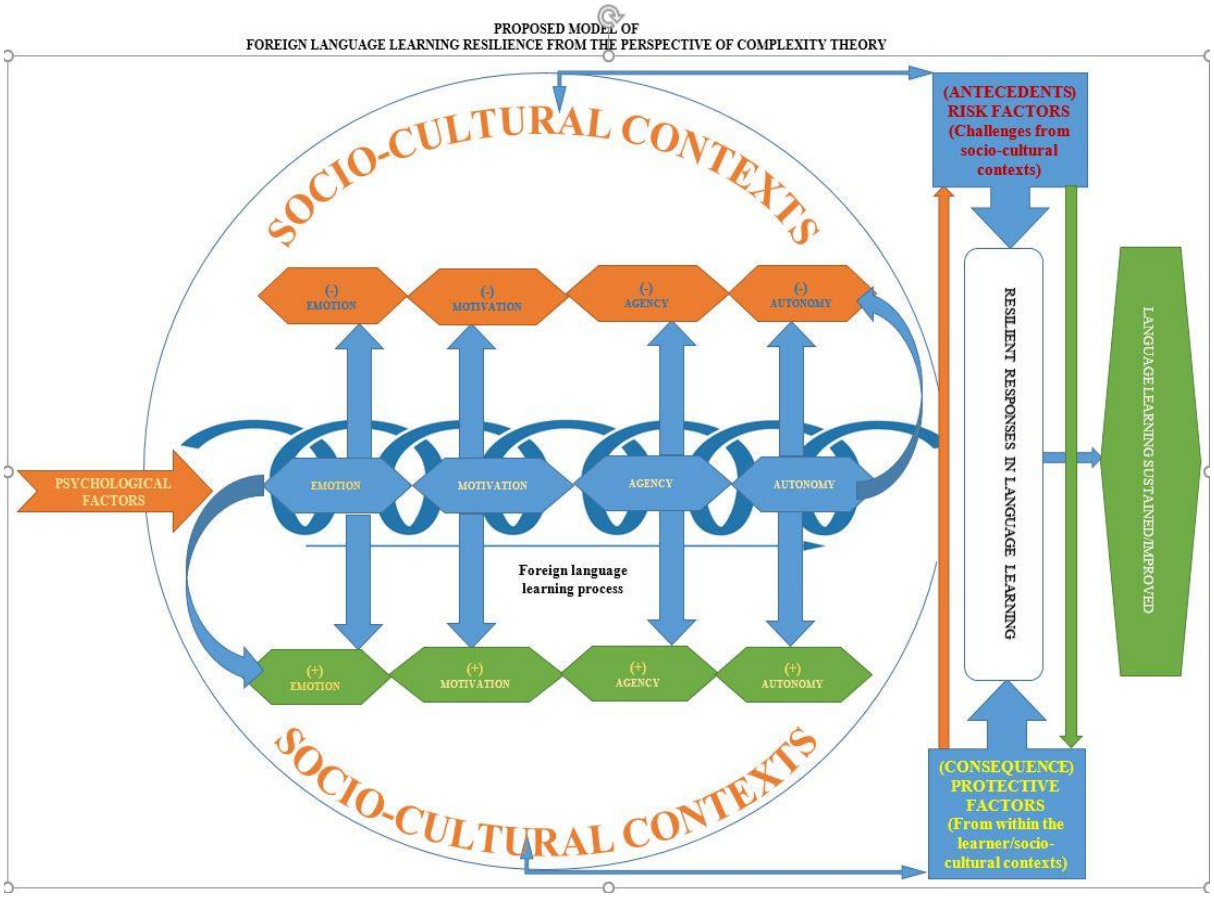

Figure 2.1: Proposed model of foreign language learner resilience

This figure captures resilience in foreign language learning as a developmental process that involves the ongoing interactions of contextual factors and intra-psychological factors influencing both negatively and positively the learning process. Foreign language learner resilience comes into being when the language learner tries to adapt in the face of challenges or difficulties (risk factors/antecedents) emerging from the socio-cultural contexts where language learning occurs. Successfully overcoming difficulties/challenges to sustain or improve in language learning by taking advantage of protective factors from socio-cultural contexts to develop protective factors from within the learner such as positive emotions, motivation, agency and autonomy represent the essence of the developmental process of resilience in foreign language learning.

2.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a conceptual framework for the current study. It has reviewed the conceptualisation of resilience from different perspectives. This prepares the ground for resilience to be seen as a developmental process, a view which establishes the foundation for the further research steps of this study. The chapter has also provided a multidisciplinary view

of resilience as being studied in different research contexts. Despite a limited number of studies into resilience in SLA, a review of these studies has indicated the significance and necessity of further exploration of the concept in the field. To situate this study in the context of second/foreign language education, the chapter included a review of SLA factors related to the concept of resilience. The review has helped identify the conceptual link between resilience and individual factors influencing the success in second/foreign language learning. More importantly, the review has also indicated dynamism and temporality as important characteristics of these factors. Lastly, the chapter has argued for the conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system by integrating the concept of resilience as a process with the process of foreign language learning. Accordingly, a definition and a model of foreign language learner resilience have been tentatively proposed, taking the CDST perspective. Drawing on this conceptualisation, CDST is also proposed as the theoretical backbone for this research. The thesis will also seek to refine the proposed model in light of the findings generated by the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. It further argues for the relevance of using CDST as the theoretical framework in this study and outlines the methodological principles to be accounted for in researching foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system. The chapter then reviews studies taking a CDST perspective to justify the selection of research methods, which is followed by the description of the fieldwork, including research site selection, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

3.1. CDST as the theoretical framework

3.1.1. CDST and its methodological principles

In the previous chapter, I have presented an overview of CDST and proposed that CDST be used in this study to explore foreign language learner resilience. However, my justification for using the theory as the theoretical framework for this study has only argued for a CDST perspective in conceptualising foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system. To further justify the use of CDST as a research approach for this study, this section explains why CDST has recently emerged as a research paradigm in SLA research and outlines the methodological principles for researching second language learning as complex dynamic systems.

3.1.1.1. CDST as an emerging paradigm

According to Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2016) complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) has been highlighted by researchers in other disciplines as a frame of reference, a conceptual toolbox, or a world view. For example, Hetherington (2013) argues:

> [C]omplexity may offer an "emerging paradigm" in educational research because it . . . challenge[s] linear methodologies and views of causality, suggest[s] that phenomena need to be viewed holistically and cannot be broken down, require[s] a focus on interactions, and argues for a contextual rather than general approach. (p. 72)

Although CDST "may not be a dominant paradigm in second language research" (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2016, p. 741), the theory seems to be receiving more attention in second language acquisition. As Mercer (2013) states:

> At present, SLA is undergoing what could be termed a 'complexity turn' as researchers become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the inherent complexity and dynamism involving learning and teaching foreign languages. (p. 376)

The above claim of Mercer (2013) reflects the trend among SLA scholars who take a perspective of CDST as a theoretical framework for their research. (See for example De Bot, 2008; De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011; De Bot et al., 2007; Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2014; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b; Mercer, 2013). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008b) believe that "[m]any of the phenomena of interest to applied linguists can be seen as complex systems"(p. 200); hence, "complexity theory offers a helpful way of thinking about applied linguistic matters" (p. 201). In fact, Larsen-Freeman (2017) even called CDST a "metatheory" of language and language learning theories (p. 11). Ellis (2008a) also supports the use of the theory in SLA research as he asserts that such theories as DST, CT, connectionism, or emergentism can serve as "general frameworks for investigating processes of emergence of systematicity and pattern from dynamic interactions" (p. 233).

Such an increasing interest in the theory seems to derive from the argument that a conventional scientific approach is inappropriate for researching second language learning as a complex system because it is unable to capture the phenomenon of language learning at the system level. According to De Bot and Larsen-Freeman (2011), traditional research approaches tend to explain the system by reducing its complexity, or more specifically, disassembling the system and examining its parts separately. Such a componential analysis is irrelevant for describing the different behaviours of the system in action because all components in the system are interconnected and interact with each other. Furthermore, a reductionist approach, with its linear view of causality, tends to embrace the notion that an outcome may have been produced by a particular cause (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b). For example, reductionist researchers might conclude that a new instructional method is effective after comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of learners from two groups of which one group received the new method of instruction after the pre-test and scored higher in the post-test. This linear view of causality does not work in researching complex dynamic systems where the components interact in a non-linear manner with each other and with the environment - also seen as a component. Such interactions lead to the systems' variation or changes that make it impossible to make any hard and fast predictions (De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011).

In general, the conventional linear cause-effect research approach is problematic in researching second language acquisition or development as a complex dynamic system because it examines

the elements or variables of second/foreign language learning in isolation. It simplifies the interconnectedness of multiple factors affecting second language acquisition or development and fails to capture the variations and temporal aspect of the process of language learning. (See for example De Bot, 2008; De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Dörnyei, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b). By pointing out the limitations of traditional research approaches to understanding complex dynamic systems, CDST proponents have, at the same time, asserted the relevance of taking the CDST as the framework for researching second/foreign language learning as a complex dynamic system.

3.1.1.2. Methodological principles in researching complex dynamic systems

Discussing research methodology from a CDST perspective, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008b) outline eight principles that researchers with a CDST perspective must take into account. Specifically, researchers must:

- Be ecologically valid, including context as part of the system(s) under investigation;
- Honor the complexity by avoiding reductionism, and avoid premature idealization by including any and all factors that might influence a system;
- Take a complexity view of dynamic processes and changing relationships among variables, by considering self-organization, feedback and emergence as central;
- Take a complexity view of reciprocal causality, rather than invoking simple, proximate cause-effect links;
- Overcome dualistic thinking, such as acquisition versus use or performance versus competence, and think in terms of co-adaptation, soft assembly, and so forth;
- Avoid conflating levels and timescales; and include thinking heterochronically;
- Consider variability as central, and investigate both stability and variability in order to understand the developing system.

(2008, p. 206)

This comprehensive list of principles seems to be summarised when De Bot and Larsen-Freeman (2011) conclude their discussion about research from a CDST perspective as follows:

> A good application of DST describes the system, its constituents, their contingencies and also their interactions. Teasing out the relationships and describing their dynamics for systems of different levels of scale are key tasks of researchers working from a DST perspective. (p. 23)

While the discussion above has indicated an increasing interest of SLA researchers in using CDST to frame not only their research but also the methodological principles for researching from a CDST perspective, it has also revealed the potential explanatory power that the theory can bring about in researching the complex phenomenon of resilience in foreign language learning. Firstly, as a CDST perspective can provide a holistic view of a complex phenomenon, using the theory for examining foreign language learner resilience can help describe it holistically as a system and bring to the fore the components of the system without breaking it down. Secondly, as the theory accounts for the interconnectedness and the interactions of the components within the system leading to its dynamism, it can serve well as a theoretical framework to examine the concept of foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system in action. Thirdly, as context is seen as a component of the system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b), taking a CDST perspective can help bring together the disparate sets of contextual and individual factors to explain the phenomenon of resilience in foreign language learning.

3.1.2. Methods used in researching complex dynamic systems

Dörnyei (2011) comments that researching foreign language learning and teaching from the perspective of complex dynamic systems is difficult due to the interconnectedness and instability of the factors (subsystems) embedded in the process of language learning. However, he concurs with De Bot and Larsen-Freeman (2011) in proposing that SLA researchers adopting CDST reverse the order generally followed in traditional research approaches. Specifically, instead of making predictions about the system's outcomes based on examining its components separately, researchers can describe the system *retro-dictively* once it has already changed (Larsen-Freeman, 2011), which means "tracing back the reasons why the system has ended up with a particular outcome" (Dörnyei, 2011, p. 6) or "explaining the next stage by the preceding one" (De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 20).

Dörnyei (2011) suggests taking the system's self-organisation into account to explore the system retrodictively. He argues that despite being dynamic and nonlinear, every complex system self-organises and tends to "display a few well-organizable outcomes or behavioural patterns" (p. 6) from which researchers can work backwards to identify the system's components. He then proposes *Retrodictive Qualitative Modelling* (hereafter referred to as *RQM)* as an approach applicable for researching complex dynamic systems.

So far the research model has been applied in a relatively small number of second language education research studies to trace the *signature dynamics* – "the main underlying dynamic patterns" leading to the system's outcomes under investigation (Dörnyei, 2011, p. 8). For example, Chan, Dörnyei, and Henry (2014) adopted an RQM approach to investigate learner archetypes and the signature dynamics of motivation in second language learning. To trace back the developmental trajectory of the second language motivational system and its signature dynamics, Dörnyei's three-phase research template was generated. The first phase involved six teachers invited to participate in a focus group to identify the salient student types (the outcomes of the motivational system). They were first asked to discuss and generate learner archetypes. As soon as they came up with seven learner archetypes, the teachers were invited to nominate prototypical students "who best represented each archetype", and "prototype-resembling" students as substitutes for prototypical students who might not want to participate in the next phase of the research (Chan et al., 2014, p. 245). In the second phase, nominated students were invited for semi-structured interviews "to obtain a rich description of the prototypical cases" (Chan et al., 2014, p. 241). Lastly, data from the interviews with students were then analysed to identify the main components of the motivational system and its signature dynamics. The results showed that the motivational trajectory and signature dynamics of the system could be identified, which indicates the feasibility of the research approach for studying complex dynamic systems. More specifically, drawing on the self-organising characteristic of complex dynamic systems, this approach allowed the authors of this study to identify the typical patterns of the motivational system. They then worked backwards from these patterns to trace the system's components and the typical changes (signature dynamics) of the system in action. However, the authors also conceded methodological limitations in recruiting participants for the second stage of data collection as, they said, the teacher-nominated prototypical students did not completely match the archetypes they had previously generated. They later suggested exploring the differences between the "teacher-defined archetypes" and the "learner types identified by the students themselves" (Chan et al., 2014, pp. 256-257). This is a recommendation that was adopted for the present study.

In a similar vein, Hiver (2017) explored the signature dynamics and the salient outcomes of a newly-developed construct – *language teacher immunity* defined as "a robust armoring system that emerges in response to high-intensity threats and allows teachers to maintain professional equilibrium and instructional effectiveness" (Hiver, 2017, pp. 669-670). The three-step RQM research template was also employed to trace the developmental trajectories of the teacher immunity system. The initial phase of the study also involved identifying the limited range of

patterns of the system. However, to ensure the rigorous participant selection in the next phase the author conducted a survey in addition to focus groups. In particular, four focus groups were conducted with 44 language teachers in South Korea, including 11 primary teachers in focus group one, 27 secondary teachers in focus group two and three, and six teacher educators in focus group four. Focus group data indicated seven constructs (*teaching self-efficacy, attitudes to teaching, coping, classroom affectivity, burnout, resilience*, and *openness to change*) contributed to generating the teacher immunity archetypes (Hiver, 2017, p. 673). A questionnaire, which included these constructs, was subsequently developed and administered online to 293 teacher participants. Cluster analysis was used to analyse data from the survey. The triangulation of cluster analysis data and focus group data corroborated six clusters which represented six archetypes of language teacher immunity, namely *the Visionary, the Spark Plug, the Fossilised Teacher, the Sell-out, the Overcompensator,* and *the Defeated Teacher*. Three questionnaire respondents most representive of the archetype they were clustered within were selected for the second phase of the study. This subsequently made up a total number of 18 prototypical cases of teacher immunity participating in "a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews"(Hiver, 2017, p. 101). The last phase of the study involved analysing data from the second phase to trace the system signature dynamics. Interview data analysis revealed the developmental trajectories of the language teacher immunity system which were in line with the four self-organisational phases of a dynamic system (*triggering, linking, realignment* and *stabilisation*) as indicated in the previous empirical findings (See for example Hiver, 2014).

Although the above research studies suggest that the RQM research template can be a possible research approach for tracing back the system to identify its components, and can thus be considered compatible with researching complex dynamic systems, alternative research methods have also been used by other researchers taking a CDST perspective. For example, Pawlak (2012) conducted a classroom-based research project over a period of four weeks. A mixed-methods research approach was used to investigate changes in the motivation of twenty-eight senior high school students within single lessons and series of lessons. Analysis and triangulation of data collected from multiple sources (questionnaires, interviews, motivation grids, and evaluation sheets) revealed that the students' motivational intensity fluctuated "on a minute-to-minute basis" (Pawlak, 2012, p. 249), which also indicated the dynamics and temporal aspects of the students' motivation. Also, Dong (2016) investigated the dynamic developmental patterns of an EFL learner's listening strategy use and listening performance and explored the interaction between these two variables over a period of forty weeks. The author carried out strategy training covering 21 listening strategies of three different types and

employed 21 listening tests adapted from the model test of CET 6 (a national English test designed for college students in China) to assess the student's listening performance. A questionnaire was used on a two-weekly basis to collect data on the student's listening strategy use. The student was also asked to keep diaries of her own reflections on the use of listening strategies. A range of quantitative data analysis techniques was used to identify the dynamic developmental patterns of the student's use of listening strategies while being trained, the interaction and the dynamic correlation between the listening strategies use and listening performance. The results indicated the nonlinear developmental patterns of both listening strategy use and listening performance, and the correlation between the two variables was characterised by dynamic developmental patterns. A downward trend was also found in the relationship between the listening strategies use and the student's listening performance during the period of study. In particular, the student's listening strategies use dropped. Noticeably from weeks 4 to 22, her listening performance showed an increasing trend. This shows a negative correlation between the two variables. The results also revealed the process of simplification, self-organisation and self-adaptation through the analysis of the dynamic developmental patterns of the student's listening strategies. The above findings of Dong's (2016) study not only reflect the complex non-linear interaction between components of the system of foreign language learning but also highlight the variability of the system at various points in times. This refutes the traditional research approach and again confirms the relevance of taking a CDST perspective to examine foreign/second language learning matters.

Mercer (2014) was another study using alternative methods. She examined the dynamics of the *self* by generating data on four timescales in accordance with the model of nested layers of the self across timescales of change proposed by David and Sumatra (Mercer, 2014, pp. 140-141). Data was collected from two advanced tertiary level EFL learners using four different tools including open-ended interviews and multimodal narratives, journals, and questionnaires. Results indicated the fluctuation of their selves at four different levels of data generation regardless of the similarities of the participants in terms of their age, choice of studies, educational background and level of proficiency. The data also revealed the dynamism in each learner's self-system.

Generally, findings of the studies (both those incorporating RQM and those using alternative methods and steps) were able to corroborate the characteristics of dynamics and variability of complex dynamic systems studied over a period of time, which cannot be seen in research studies measuring points in pre-test and post-test at two different points of time.

The review of the above studies shows that although taking the stance of complex dynamic systems theory in researching second/foreign language learning has attracted a number of researchers in the field, the choice of research methods may vary as long as they take into consideration the key characteristics of a complex dynamic system. This study examined foreign language learner resilience in the context of English education at a university in Vietnam. It sought to identify the components of resilience as a complex dynamic system composed of sets of individual learner factors fluctuating over time in accordance with the change of contextual ones. The research project did not rigidly follow the RQM research template or employ the specific sequence and type of mixed methods as in the studies reviewed above. It did, however, acknowledge the idea of retro-diction in researching complex dynamic systems as suggested by De Bot and Larsen-Freeman (2011) and it drew on the notion of both teacher and student-generated archetypes. To explain how this applies, this study sought to identify a selection of people who seem to typify resilient learners and work backwards to explain how they have become so.

3.2. Research methods for the current study

My initial intention was to employ exploratory sequential mixed methods with a developmental design, where "analysis of the preliminary data informs and/or initiates the development of subsequent phase of data collection" (Bazeley, 2018, p. 73). The idea was appealing to me as the design would allow me to gain insights into the concept of foreign language learner resilience and to test the applicability of its constituents in a broader context as well. The data collection procedure was intended to include three phases of which focus groups and one-on-one interviews were the first two phases to identify the possible outcomes of the system of resilience and its components. The third phase was to be a questionnaire building on the results from the first two phases to see whether the findings from the qualitative data might be generalisable to other contexts.

However, I decided not to conduct the quantitative data collection for two reasons. Firstly, the analysis of qualitative data from the unexpectedly large number of participants who volunteered to participate in the interviews took up an enormous amount of time within the limited timeframe of doctoral research. Secondly and more importantly, testing the applicability of the components of resilience in a broader context would inadvertently equate to seeing resilience as a static concept, which would go against my own proposed conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience as a complex dynamic system, and thus also the CDST methodological principles. As a result, this was a purely qualitative study in which teacher

focus group discussions and learner one-on-one interviews were the methods of data collection. The sequential developmental design was preserved because the current study takes CDST as its theoretical framework and explores foreign language learner resilience retrodictively. More specifically, the teacher focus group discussions served as a method to identify the possible outcomes of the system of foreign language learner resilience. Data from the focus groups were used for developing questions for learner one-on-one semi-structured interviews in the subsequent phase to tease out the system's components.

3.2.1. Participant selection

This research project was exploratory in nature driven by the overarching research question, *What does resilience look like in language learning?* Hence, the different perspectives of both teachers and students contributed to providing a holistic view of resilience in foreign language learning. While the teachers were selected to participate in the focus groups, the students were chosen for the semi-structured interviews.

Both the teacher and student participants in this study were recruited from a university in the central highlands of Vietnam where I have worked as a lecturer. I acknowledge that collecting data from my workplace might run the risk of "researcher bias and subjectivity" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 217) and confusion between my role as a researcher and that as a friend, colleague or teacher towards the participants. However, choosing an unfamiliar research site would have complicated the process of gaining access to the site and establishing rapport with participants. In view of this, I decided to recruit the participants for the current study from where I previously worked to facilitate this process. Despite the advantages from being an insider of sorts, I followed a strict procedure for recruiting participants as outlined in the ethics application approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. To seek approval for access to the university and permission to approach the teachers and students of the Faculty, I contacted the university's Rector and the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and sent them the information letter (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the research. They readily consented. This allowed me to identify my role as a researcher without confusing it with other roles. More precisely, at the time I applied for permission to access the research site, I self-identified as an independent researcher because my lecturer role at the university was inactive.

3.2.1.1. Focus group participants

To recruit the teachers for the first phase of this research study, I used purposive sampling. According to Dörnyei (2007), purposive sampling is widely used by qualitative researchers as it is a method that allows for a selection of participants that can best inform the research problem. In addition, participants selected from purposive sampling can provide rich information to answer the research questions (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The participants for the focus group discussions of this study included the teachers from the faculty of foreign languages at the university. They were asked to share ideas about the typical resilient students drawing on their teaching experiences. Data from the focus groups was also intended to serve as the basis for developing the questions for the semi-structured interviews in the next stage. Therefore, the focus discussion participants were selected purposefully based on their professional experiences. Teachers with at least five years of experience were invited to participate because they were assumed to have been exposed to and working with a diverse range of students.

To first approach potential participants, I invited a pool of teachers in the faculty for coffee and friendly collegial conversation as it is customary in Vietnamese culture when someone wants to reconnect with friends or colleagues after a long time. I also took the opportunity to share my research study with them and to informally express my intention to invite them to participate. As soon as I received approval from the university authorities, I emailed the information letters (see Appendix B) to the teachers before the first scheduled focus group discussion. I received Google form responses from 14 teachers who accepted the invitation to participate. To arrange the focus groups, I contacted each of the teachers on their mobile numbers to confirm the time and venue. One of the teachers was actually the dean of the faculty and had a busy schedule which made it impossible to put him in any of the focus groups. Eventually, the total number of participants recruited at this stage was thirteen teachers. (see Table 3.1 for the teacher participant profiles).

Table 3.1: Profiles of teacher participants

No.	Focus group	Teacher participants (Pseudonyms)	Teaching experience	Subjects teaching
1	Focus group 1	Y	8 years	Reading comprehension General English
2		Hoang	26 years	Language skills and Linguistics
3		Tuong	20 years	Phonetics, Translation, Speaking skills
4		Ngoc	7 years	General English/Listening skill
5		Doan	5 years	Speaking skill/ General English
6	Focus group 2	Hien	20 years	Language skills: reading and listening
7		Le	24 years	Grammar, syntax, writing, teaching methods
8		Ho	21 years	Writing skill, cross-culture analysis, speaking
9		Thanh	5 years	General English/speaking skill
10		Tran	5 years	Writing skill/ Research methodology/ British culture
11	Focus group 3	Kim	20 years	Language skills: writing, translation, etymology
12		Thi	19 years	Language skill: listening, ESP, British/American Culture
13		Tong	15 years	Language skill: speaking, Interpretation, sociolinguistics

3.2.1.2. Semi-structured interview participants

The strategy used for recruiting participants for the second phase of this study aimed to identify more outcome patterns of the system of foreign language learner resilience. It could also be classified as purposive sampling because to qualify as participants in this phase of data collection, the students were asked two questions about whether they had experienced difficulties or challenges and managed to overcome those, and whether they were making improvements or getting more engaged in learning English. These questions were included in the information letters (see Appendix C). In answering "yes" to these questions, they self-identified as resilient foreign language learners.

Although the intended participants for this phase of data collection had been proposed to include students from two year groups – year one and four, I was only able to contact students who had

just enrolled in their second and fourth year because it was the beginning of the academic year and the first-year students were expected to enrol no sooner than a month later. Basically, at the time of data collection, there were no first-year students enrolled. Therefore, the second-year or just-completed-first-year students who agreed to voluntarily participate in this study are still referred to as first-year students for consistency. Furthermore, in order to meet my time deadlines, I arranged face-to-face meetings with potential student participants.

Four face-to-face meetings were arranged with the participation of approximately 240 students majoring in English language and English language education from four classes. Each meeting took around 20 minutes during which I briefly introduced myself to the students and explained my present role as a doctoral student at a university in New Zealand, researching English language education. I also took the opportunity to hand out the information letters and consent forms (Appendix C) both in Vietnamese and English and explain the purpose of my research. A five-minute Q&A session was also scheduled in each meeting to clarify the students' inquiries about the aim and significance of the research and their contribution as volunteer informants in the research study. I also emphasised the voluntary nature of their participation in this research project and my sole researcher role, which I assumed would minimise the risk of coercion I might cause to the students. The students were asked to sign the Vietnamese version of the consent forms to indicate their interest and voluntary participation and write their preferred ways of contact on the back of the consent forms so that I could contact them to confirm the time and venue for the interviews. I received 52 responses from the students, expressing their interest and willingness to participate in my research project. Thirty-four confirmed their participation when I contacted them to confirm the time and venue for the interviews.

3.2.2. Data collection

3.2.2.1. Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are group interviews that aim to "explore the perceptions or experiences of a small group of persons who have some common basis for responding" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 123). Also, focus groups are commonly suggested because of their appropriateness for both exploratory and explanatory research into social phenomena (Minichiello, Aronie, & Hays, 2008). During focus group interviews, the participants are encouraged to build on one another's ideas, which helps increase the quality and richness of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). From the perspective of CDST, Dörnyei (2011)

recommended using focus groups as a possible method to identify the salient dynamic outcome patterns of the system. In this study, focus group discussions with teacher participants were used because the teachers were assumed to have existing ideas about what resilient language learners look like from their teaching experience. Hence, the teacher participants were asked to discuss typical successful language learners despite challenges or difficulties, drawing on their teaching experiences. Data from the focus group discussions were intended to serve as the basis for designing the interview questions for the later research stage.

In an interview research study, the researcher must take into consideration the refinement of the data collection instruments through an interview protocol refinement framework (IPR) which allows the researcher to elicit rich and detailed qualitative data from the participants and to ensure the rigour of the research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). For this study, I first developed the questions for the focus group discussions. The process of question development was adapted from the questioning route suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015) and the IPR framework by Castillo-Montoya (2016). The questions for the focus group were first aligned with the research questions. Each interview question was followed by probes aiming at delving deeper into the participants' experiences and creating a conversational atmosphere while maintaining the inquiry purpose.

The pilot group discussion

As soon as the interview protocol was developed, I conducted a pilot group discussion with a group of Vietnamese EFL teachers who were enrolled as PhD students at the University of Waikato at the time. The purpose was to test whether the interview questions would generate data effectively and whether I could ask the questions efficiently. The pilot was also presumed to be an opportunity for me to practise conducting a focus group interview. Prior to the pilot, I developed a 3-stage procedure adapting the framework for organisation and moderation of focus groups by Krueger and Casey (2015). The procedure included organisational planning, pre-discussion tasks, and a questioning route to facilitate the discussion (see Appendix F).

Four of the Vietnamese PhD students currently enrolled at the University of Waikato were university English lecturers with experience and knowledge about English language education at the university level in Vietnam. I supposed they would contribute much to the development and refinement of the questions to be used in the actual focus group discussions. Three of the four who had formally consented to participate were able to come to the group discussion at the time and venue scheduled.

I started the pilot focus group discussion with a brief explanation about the research purpose to the participants, though hard copies of the information letter about the research project had been given beforehand. The focus group discussion took approximately forty minutes, and afterwards, they were also asked to share their opinions and suggestions for the improvement of the discussion. The language used in the group discussion was Vietnamese because the participants were more comfortable conversing in their first language. The participants' ideas and sharing during the pilot group discussion and afterwards revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the interview questions as well as the way I moderated this discussion.

Concerning the focus group interview questions in the IPR framework (see Appendix G), the first three questions which served as the opening of the discussion and introduction to the topic seemed to work well as the participants appeared to be engaged. They shared interesting and rich information about the challenges/difficulties confronting English language learners at universities in Vietnam. The transitional question which aimed to lead the participants into the topic of resilience in foreign language learning also functioned well as they all confirmed that there exists a certain proportion of successful language learners in the classes they have taught recently. The participants also provided a lot of information when asked to recall typical English language learners who had made progress in learning the language despite being under some difficult circumstances. However, it seemed the key questions, as well as the prompts, could not elicit more fully detailed information from them. Except for some contextual and interactional factors, little was found about the individual factors hindering or contributing to language learning. Noticeably, the participants found themselves a bit challenged to categorise types of resilient language learners drawing on the examples that they had given. Furthermore, although Vietnamese was used to facilitate the communication in the focus group, the translations of some of the questions were a little ambiguous, which sometimes caused the participants some difficulties understanding the questions, thus needing further explanation or prompting.

Regarding the organisation and moderation of the pilot focus group discussion, I followed the procedure adapted from Krueger and Casey (2015). Technically, the focus group took place smoothly, but it looked more like an interview than a discussion because of the turn-taking rule that I set at the beginning of the discussion. As a result, a conversational atmosphere was not established as the participants one by one responded to the questions. In addition, while a certain amount of silence during focus groups could have helped draw additional information from the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015), as a novice moderator, I was a bit impatient and

uncomfortable with the pauses so that I moved quickly on to other topics and failed to get more information.

In general, the pilot focus group discussion helped identify the strong points as well as the shortcomings of the first-stage data collection tool, which then facilitated the refinement of the tool for data collection. In consultation with my supervisors, I reworded the questions to make them more comprehensible and add more probes to elicit more information from the participants. I also planned to modify my questioning behaviour.

The focus group discussions

I followed the three-stage procedure for focus group discussions previously developed and used in the pilot group discussion (see Appendix F). Before each of the three focus group discussions I conducted, I contacted the teachers via phone (text messaging) or emails to confirm the time and venue for the discussion. I also had the information letters and consent forms at hand so that I could collect the signed consent forms.

The first two focus group discussions were conducted at the faculty's computer room on August 15th and 17th with the participation of five teachers in each group. The third focus group discussion took place on August 25th with three teacher participants in a quiet coffee shop. All three focus groups were conducted in Vietnamese which made the teachers feel comfortable in expressing themselves and helped me capture the full meaning of what they said. The first focus group discussion lasted one hour and fifteen minutes, the second forty-six minutes, and the third fifty-three minutes. A voice recorder was also used to record discussions with the participants' permission before I started each discussion. Field notes were also taken during the discussions using a form I developed beforehand (see Appendix H) to keep track of who was speaking and what was happening during the focus group discussions.

3.2.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a popular data collection method in qualitative research (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). This type of interview is commonly used in applied linguistics because of its flexibility, which allows the researcher to both "provide guidance and direction" relevant to the research purpose and encourage the participants to "elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the students who self-identified as resilient foreign language learners. They were asked to share their individual learning trajectories which

disclosed how they had become resilient in their language learning. Data from the secmi-structured interviews served as the basis for identifying the components of the concept of foreign language learner resilience.

As aforementioned, questions for semi-structured interviews were built upon the data from the previous data collection phase. Accordingly, based on the themes that emerged from the initial analysis of data from focus groups, I designed the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix L) which later guided me to develop a set of fifteen questions corresponding to the themes.

Refinement of the semi-structured interview protocol

According to Kallio et al. (2016), the objectivity and trustworthiness of a qualitative research study where semi-structured interviews are used as a data collection tool can be strengthened by the rigorous development of a semi-structured interview guide. They propose a five-phase procedure for developing a guide which includes: "(1) identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews; (2) retrieving and using previous knowledge; (3) formulating the preliminary semi-structured interview guide; (4) pilot testing the guide; and (5) presenting the complete semi-structured interview guide*"* (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2954). In a similar vein, Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggests using the interview protocol refinement framework to improve the quality and richness of the data from interviews. The suggested four-phase framework consists of "ensuring interview questions align with research questions, constructing an inquiry-based conversation, receiving feedback on interview protocols, and piloting the interview protocol" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 812). To ensure the reliability of the interview protocol and the effectiveness of the questions which were expected to later enhance the quality and contribute to the trustworthiness of the data from the semi-structured interviews, I acknowledged and chose to adapt both the semi-structured interview guide suggested by Kallio et al. (2016) and the interview protocol refinement framework developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016). However, because the time scheduled for the first two phases of data collection was limited, I conducted the refinement of the semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix L) a bit differently bearing in mind some key phases suggested by the above researchers. This gave me more time to conduct interviews with the students.

Firstly, instead of mapping the interview questions onto the research questions as recommended in the framework, I checked the alignment between the interview questions and the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the preliminary analysis of the focus groups data. Secondly, I

developed the interview questions in a conversational style while preserving their inquiry purpose. This included freeing the questions from jargon and putting them in the order that first helped elicit the general information from the participants then slowly moved closer to the key points relevant to the research aim. Drawing on my supervisors' suggestions, I reworded the questions to make them clear and answerable for the participants.

Pilot testing the interview protocol/guide is an indispensable phase that provides the researcher with the opportunity to try out the questions in actual interviews to see how well they have been developed and what changes should be made in order to improve the quality of the data collection tool (See for example Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kallio et al., 2016; Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, & Yusof, 2017). In view of this and aligned with my experience of pilot testing the focus group procedure, I embarked on pilot testing the interview protocol with students as a final step to refine it. Four pilot semi-structured interviews were conducted with the voluntary participation of four students from two different year groups (year 2 and 4). Four students were selected for the pilot interviews because their availability fit well with the schedule that I set beforehand for the pilot interviews. Furthermore, as the pilot interviews aimed to test the feasibility and the effectiveness of the interview protocol, the participants did not know that they were involved in the pilot interviews, and steps simulating actual interviews (e.g. signing consent forms) were followed strictly. All pilot semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded.

Apart from the lack of experience in conducting semi-structured interviews including the probing techniques which I tried to improve in one pilot interview after another, the pilot semi-structured interviews indicated that the interview protocol was adequate and ready for use in actual semi-structured interviews. As for the interview questions, they were able to elicit participants' thoughts and experiences relevant to the purpose of the research. Hence, I completed the refinement of the interview protocol and questions by reading through the questions again and checking spelling before sending them to the ethics committee as a memo for approval as an extension to the original ethics application.

The semi-structured interviews

One day prior to each interview, I contacted each student participant to reconfirm the time and venue at their convenience. I followed the steps detailed in my approved ethics application (approval letter received February 7, 2018). I explained the purpose of the research again and assured the student participant that what was said in the interview would be kept confidential,

would only be used for the purpose of my research and that the participant's real name would not be referred to in any of the publications relating to my research. Finally, the student participant reconfirmed his/her voluntary involvement in the research study by signing the consent form in English with reference to the Vietnamese version he/she had signed previously.

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participation of 17 second-year students and 13 fourth-year students majoring in both English language and English language education. The duration of the interviews varied between 25 minutes and an hour, which was in line with the proposed duration for each semi-structured interview. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 below show the demographic information of the student participants in this study. It includes the participants' gender, age, ethnicity, the year they were in, and their majors.

Table 3.2: Profiles of second-year student participants

Semi-structured interview participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age (At the time of interview)	Ethnicity	Year of enrolment	Major
Ba	Male	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Trang	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language
Bich	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Dai	Male	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
My	Female	28	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Nha	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Ha	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Hoai	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Hoang	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
May	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Ngoc	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Nguyen	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education
Nhu	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language
Ni	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language
Uyen	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language
Vy	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language
Xuan	Female	20	Kinh	Second year	English language education

Table 3.3: Profiles of fourth-year student participants

Semi-structured interview participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age (At the time of interview)	Ethnicity	Year of enrolment	Major
HKhuen	Female	22	Ede	Fourth year	English language
HNhe	Female	22	Ede	Fourth year	English language
Huyen	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Rahlan	Male	22	Ede	Fourth year	English language education
Lan	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Minh	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language
Tin	Male	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Quy	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language
Nguyen	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language
An	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Thu	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Tu	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language education
Thuya	Female	22	Kinh	Fourth year	English language

3.2.3. Data analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2012), "thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). To put it simply, it is a method of identifying and making sense of the commonalities in what is said or written about a topic being explored by the researcher. The method can be used to "identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviours and practices" (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 297). Thematic analysis is used widely in qualitative research because of its accessibility and flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013), like many qualitative researchers, view thematic analysis "as an independent and reliable qualitative approach to data analysis" (p. 400) because it provides researchers with skills for qualitative data analysis while offering them flexibility in conducting the analysis. More specifically, this method offers novice qualitative researchers a systematic way of analysing qualitative data without being bound by particular ontological and epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2017). Accordingly, thematic analysis allows researchers to analyse qualitative data both inductively and deductively, which means codes and themes simultaneously emerge from the data and are generated from particular theoretical or conceptual frameworks.

The process of thematic analysis includes six phases, namely familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and

naming themes, and producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) summarise the process as shown in Table 3.4 below:

Table 3.4: Process of data analysis in thematic analysis

Phases	Descriptions
1. Familiarising oneself with the data	Transcribing the data, reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing potential themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

Given that thematic analysis is an accessible and flexible method for data analysis, it was adopted to analyse the data collected for this study. Firstly, as this study aims to explore the concept of resilience in foreign language learning drawing on the participants' experiences and perspectives, the inductive analysis of data allowed me to capture the participants' experiences and perspectives without a fixed idea of what they might be. Secondly, as the conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience draws on resilience theories and a perspective of CDST, my interpretation of the data was also guided by resilience theories and CDST, which reflects the deductive process of data analysis.

3.2.3.1. Focus group discussions

Due to the limited time for the fieldwork during which I had to collect data from two different groups of informants – the teachers and the students, I decided to split the analysis of focus group data into two stages. While the first stage was the preliminary analysis which aimed to develop the interview questions for the subsequent phase of data collection, the second stage delved deeper into the data to identify the typical outcomes of the system of foreign language learner resilience and to generate the labels for these learner outcomes drawing on the teacher participants' descriptions of typical resilient language learners they had worked with.

Preliminary analysis

Bearing in mind that focus group data was intended to be used for the development of questions for the subsequent phase of data collection which would include individual interviews, I started to transcribe the focus group audiotaped data as soon as I finished the focus group discussions to facilitate my first stage of focus group data analysis. A *denaturalised* transcription approach was employed to transcribe the focus group discussions. According to Azevedo et al. (2017) "denaturalized transcription prioritizes the verbal speech and focuses on the omission of the idiosyncratic speech elements . . . thus presenting itself as a more polished and selective transcription" (p. 161). In addition, Widodo (2014) argues that "what matters in denaturalized transcripts is that meanings and perceptions construct one's reality". This initial step of data analysis allowed me to immerse myself in the data as I had to listen to the recordings, read and re-read the transcripts, and note down initial ideas.

Data from three focus group discussions included recounts about the learning trajectories of thirteen different English language learners whom the teacher participants had taught. After reading the transcripts and noting down ideas, I continued with summarising the data. To summarise the data from the focus groups, each learner's learning trajectory was described according to the difficulties or challenges they faced in the process of learning English, the factors conducive to their learning, and the type of learner they could be classified as. The descriptions of their learning trajectories were put in the summaries of the focus group discussions corresponding to the ones whose learning trajectories were shared. Specifically, focus group one and two included five cases each, and focus group three included three cases. The initial analysis signified the saturation of the data needed at this stage of the study. Saunders et al. (2018) identified four data saturation models, namely *theoretical saturation, inductive thematic saturation, a priori thematic saturation,* and *data saturation*. At this stage of the study, data saturation was determined drawing on the fourth model which suggests identifying the repetition of information in the data collected and/or through preliminary analysis. As such, focus group data was found saturated because information regarding typical resilient learner was found repeated and further information about possible typical resilient English language learners was unlikely to be able to be elicited from another focus group discussion given the homogeneity of the teacher participants in terms of the research site they were selected from. Additionally, by using purposive sampling the participants who met the criteria set for the recruitment of participants constituted more than two-thirds of the teachers in the faculty of foreign languages – a sizable sample from the total number of teachers. Thus, the organisation of more focus groups would not be feasible in terms of the number of eligible participants.

As per the research ethics application, summaries of focus group transcripts were intended to be sent to the participants for information purposes only. Although I had the focus group discussions summarised, for cultural reasons and the purpose of courtesy, I decided to send thank-you emails attached with the transcripts to the teacher participants of corresponding focus groups. There is a consensus among scholars that sending transcripts to interviewees could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is considered as an act of empowering the interviewees and/or acknowledging their contribution to the research, but on the other hand, sending transcripts to participants could raise some issues of which distortion or loss of the data collected due to the interviewees' effort to clarify and amend their spoken language is likely to influence the research quality (See for example Hagens, Dobrow, & Chafe, 2009; Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Especially, data from a focus group interview does not belong to an individual, thus it is often believed that the disadvantages caused by sending transcripts to focus group participants outweigh the advantages. However, as aforementioned the transcripts of focus groups were sent to the teacher participants for cultural and courteous reasons, I received emails from 10 out of 13 participants confirming their agreement with the transcripts which remained intact. Although three participants did not reply to confirm their agreement with the transcript, they were assumed to have agreed by default with the information in the transcripts because the email sent to them had specified that they were expected to contact me if they had any concerns about the correctness of the information in the transcripts. As the teacher participants confirmed and raised no concerns about the correctness of the information from focus groups, I continued analysing the data for the development of interview questions for the next stage of data collection.

Drawing on the summaries, I generated initial codes and potential themes and subthemes which allowed me to develop the protocol for semi-structured interviews. Fifteen questions put under potential themes and subthemes were included in the semi-structured interview protocol. A memorandum attached with these questions was sent to the FEDU ethics committee to apply for the extension to the ethics approval for the research project (see Appendix M).

The second stage of analysis

As aforementioned, the second stage delved deeper into the focus group data to identify the outcomes of the system of foreign language learner resilience and generate the labels for these outcomes drawing on the participants' descriptions of the learners. To carry out the second stage of the data from the focus groups, I used Nvivo 12, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software tool commonly used by qualitative researchers. Given the complexity of the

qualitative data, the use of this software facilitated the process of data analysis as it allowed me to manage the data more efficiently, and it provided quick access to the data for coding and exploring the data more thoroughly (Bazeley, 2013; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Before importing the transcript documents into Nvivo for analysis, I translated the transcripts into English. I did not have the translated versions proofread and in this way, I avoided compromising confidentiality. The translation of the transcripts not only allowed me to immerse myself again in the data but also facilitated my analysis as I could explore the data using the Nvivo query tools which work better on English texts. Then, I prepared the transcript documents by setting heading styles for the names of the focus group participants and the questions used in the focus groups. This structuring of the focus group transcript documents enabled automatic coding which subsequently facilitated further data analysis. More specifically, I used the software's Autocode tool to categorise data automatically by the participants' pseudonyms and the questions. (See Appendix N for Nvivo screenshots showing what this process looked like).

This automatic coding, subsequently, facilitated further coding because it allowed me to see the responses of different teacher participants from different focus groups at the same time to compare and contrast information and carry out the coding without having to look at the transcripts one by one and do copy-cut-paste manual coding. For further coding, I dragged and dropped selected texts from the transcripts into the *List View* window of Nvivo to create nodes by the potential subthemes generated in the preliminary analysis. These nodes were then put under the parent nodes viz. *difficulties/challenges* and *protective factors* from which I continued coding to identify eight typical resilient learner outcomes of foreign language learner resilience which I labelled as *determined, passion-driven, lacking self-efficacy, self-reliant, failure resistant, encouragement triggered, encouragement and assessment triggered,* and *agentive.* Each learner outcome, seen as a theme, was characterised by two subthemes namely antecedents and consequences which respectively included coded data about the difficulties/challenges and individual factors and contextual resources the learner relied on to bounce back. (See Figure 3.3)

Table 3.5: Matrix of focus group data coding

Typical learner outcomes	Agentive	Determined	Encouragement triggered	Encouragement and assessment triggered	Failure resistant	Lacking self-efficacy	Passion driven	Self-reliant
Antecedents	Limited English learning opportunity Low level of proficiency Anxiety	Socio-economic and geographical disadvantages Limited learning resources and facilities	Socio-economic and geographical disadvantages Low level of proficiency Emotional behaviour/lack of self-efficacy	Extremely low level of proficiency due to limited English learning opportunity	Limited English learning opportunity Low level of proficiency	Dropping out after two years studying Biology to study English Lack of self-efficacy	Pressure from parents' expectation Pressure from new learning environment	Family issue Eccentric behaviours in classroom (tendency to self-isolate from other peers)
Consequences	Resourcefulness Initiative Teacher's support	Strong sense of purpose Self-awareness Self-determination Initiative	Teacher's encouragement leading to positive emotions, resourcefulness, and initiative.	Teacher's encouragement and ongoing assessment leading to hard-working and improvement	Failure resistance Resourcefulness	Strong emotional investment	Sense of purpose Strong emotional investment Resourcefulness	Teachers' positive feedback leading to changes in behaviours (proactive in class activities and supporting peers)

3.2.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

The analysis of data from semi-structured interviews was carried out in a similar way to that of the data from focus groups. Data from interviews with thirty students were first transcribed. The transcripts of all thirty student interviews, however, were not translated into English because the translation of more than a hundred pages of text would require a huge amount of time while I might not use all of the text in the transcripts as data for coding. Instead, I first prepared the transcript documents by putting the responses under eight categories corresponding to the semi-structured protocol and setting heading styles for the categories and the interview questions. More specifically, the responses of the students were grouped into eight categories, namely the social settings where the participants' learning trajectories started, their family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, individual and/or interactional difficulties, behaviours in response to difficulties and challenges, individual factors conducive to their learning, and the types of learner they identified themselves as. The transcript documents were then structured accordingly by setting heading styles for the categories, the interview questions and the students' pseudonyms.

Next, I imported the transcripts into Nvivo for autocoding as preliminary processing of the interview data. At this stage, Nvivo automatically put each student participant's responses to questions corresponding to eight categories specified in the semi-structured interview protocol. For example, the *social setting* category included three questions, then the responses of 17 first-year students to these three questions would be automatically put under this category by Nvivo. This categorisation of data facilitated my quick access to each and every student response to the questions in this category for the next step of coding (see Appendix N for the Nvivo screenshot). After having Nvivo do the autocoding, I carried out the coding again manually using Nvivo by dragging and dropping excerpts into the ListView window of the software to generate more conceptual codes and themes. The excerpts coded manually in this stage were then translated during the process of reporting the data.

To further analyse the data, I read the participants' responses to the interview questions and collated texts to generate codes. Guided by resilience theories, I created two parent nodes *perceived risk factors* and *perceived protective factors* in each folder of data from interviews with two cohorts of students. Under the parent node risk factors, contextual and individual difficulties or challenges were coded to three child nodes: community, institutional, and familial contexts. Three similar child nodes were also generated under the parent node protective factors

drawing on collated data on contextual resources and individual factors the participants had relied on to overcome the challenges or difficulties. (See Table 3.6 below)

Table 3.6: Matrix of coding data from semi-structured interviews with students

Contextual dimensions	Community		Institutional		Familial	
	Contextual	**Individual**	**Contextual**	**Individual**	**Contextual**	**Individual**
Perceived risk factors	Delayed/limited learning opportunity and lack of environment for (authentic) language practice due to disadvantaged socio-economic and geographical conditions	Lack of motivation	Teachers' lack of support and traditional teaching practices Peers' lack of engagement Assessment and testing	Demotivation Anxiety Lack of self-efficacy	Parental divorces Family bereavements Financial difficulties Lack of support and encouragement	Sadness Frustration Nervousness/ Anxiety
Perceived protective factors	English speaking clubs Social relationships, including part-time workmates and friends from outside the institutional context Virtual environment (Social media)	Purposefulness (Motivation) Resourcefulness and initiative (Autonomy/ Agency) Self-awareness Optimism Perseverance	Teachers' support and encouragement Peer collaboration	Purposefulness (Motivation) Resourcefulness and initiative (Autonomy/ Agency) Self-awareness Optimism Perseverance	Family's support and encouragement	Purposefulness (Motivation) Resourcefulness and initiative (Autonomy/ Agency) Self-awareness Optimism Perseverance

3.2.3. Ethical considerations

Taking into consideration the ethical issues is important in conducting research and has been a common practice among academics irrespective of what type of research they are doing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lodico et al., 2010). Most educational research studies involve human participation which makes ethical considerations more imperative (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). As an educational research study, this research project was subject to the approval of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. The ethics application covering ethical issues potentially arising across all stages of this research project was approved prior to the data collection. For this study, three main issues ethical issues were

identified. These included access to the research site and approaching participants, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

The issues of gaining access to the research site, approaching the participants and obtaining informed consent were addressed in a morally proper manner, with careful considerations of the relevant stakeholders, including the university's authorities, teachers, and students. Details of these ethical considerations were embedded in my description of participant selection for this study (see Section 3.2.1).

For this study, confidentiality involved keeping the participants' identities undisclosed. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants in this study, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants and locations mentioned in the data that could reveal the participants' identities, during transcribing and coding. Given the nature of the focus group discussions, anonymity could not be completely guaranteed. However, the issue was addressed as all the focus group participants signed the consent form (Appendix B2) which included a statement of non-disclosure.

In general, in an attempt to minimise the potential risks that the participants could be exposed to by participating in this research project, the ethical issues of the study were taken into consideration and addressed in conformity with the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related activities regulations 2008. I received the approval letter of the ethics application from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato on the seventh of February 2018.

3.2.4. Trustworthiness

While validity and reliability are the common criteria to judge the quality of a quantitative study, the quality or rigour of a qualitative research study is often ensured by its truth value, technically referred to as trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be established through *credibility, transferability, dependability*, and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This section describes the aforementioned criteria to obtain trustworthiness and discusses how trustworthiness was established in this study.

3.2.4.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the level of truthfulness and appropriateness of qualitative research findings from a shared perspective of the researcher, the participants and the audience for the research

(McGinn, 2010). It is the most important criterion to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). Common strategies to promote credibility may include prolonged fieldwork, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, negative cases analysis, and reflective commentary.

The credibility of this study was enhanced by a variety of techniques. Although I only spent two months on the fieldwork, it did not take long for me to build trust and establish rapport with the participants because I used to work at the research site and was identified as a former colleague and a former lecturer by the teacher participants and the student participants respectively. Hence, this allowed the participants to freely share with me their experiences, viewpoints, and feelings, leading to thick descriptions. To ensure the validity and appropriateness of the data collection tools, I developed the focus group discussion procedure (see Appendix F), the focus group protocol matrix (see Appendix G) and the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix L). The data collection tools were piloted and refined prior to gathering data for the study. As such, data was collected using two different methods. Moreover, the data of this study was gathered from three groups of informants, including the teachers, first-year students, and fourth-year students. The triangulation of the data from different sources provided a rich and holistic picture of the concept under examination (Shenton, 2004). In addition to the frequent meetings with my supervisory panel about the research project at different stages of my research, I managed to disseminate my research by presenting at conferences, including three international conferences on applied linguistics (in Australia and Vietnam) and two postgraduate conferences (at the University of Waikato). The feedback from academics at these meetings and conferences helped reinforce my arguments and justifications for the research methods.

3.2.4.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied in or transferred to other contexts (Connelly, 2016; Stahl & King, 2020). Transferability can be promoted by thick descriptions of the research context, methodology, or phenomenon under examination (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). The transferability of this study was enhanced through my proposed conceptualisation of the concept of foreign language learner resilience, in-depth description of the research methods and data analysis, and the description of the issues of English language education in Vietnam that set the scene for my research. Moreover, various excerpts from the participants' accounts provided vivid pictures of

the context of this research, which increases the audience's confidence in applying the findings to other similar contexts.

3.2.4.3. Dependability

Dependability is a substitute for the term reliability in quantitative research. While reliability is used to describe the consistency of the results yielded from employing the same methods for data collection from the same participants, and in the same context, dependability, proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the third criterion and referred to as "the *trust* in *trustworthy* [my italics]" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 28). Dependability can be achieved by the detailed description of "the processes within the study" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71) and peer-debriefing (Stahl & King, 2020). The dependability of this study was promoted through my frequent consultation with my supervisors regarding data collection and analysis, and discussions with fellow PhD students about my justification for the research methods. Furthermore, my detailed description of the research methods above also contributed to enhancing the dependability of this study.

3.2.4.4. Confirmability

Confirmability denotes objectivity in qualitative research (Connelly, 2016). However, Shenton (2004) argues that it is difficult for researchers to keep the research findings totally free from bias given their inevitable involvement in the research process. Instead, qualitative researchers seek to reduce as much as possible the subjectivity of the research findings by such strategies as acknowledging their "own predispositions", describing in detail methods for data collection and analysis, and having these research methods debriefed to enable auditing (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To enhance the confirmability of this study, I acknowledged the advantage of collecting data from a university where I used to work; yet I established an interested but detached perspective during the research process by identifying myself as a researcher, represented in the way I gained access to the research site and approached the participants for data collection, as described throughout section 3.2. in this chapter. The confirmability was also promoted through my justification for and detailed descriptions of the research methods which included steps taken to collect the data based on a CDST perspective and procedures followed to analyse the data. (Samples of documents related to the process of the data collection and analysis are appended at the end of this thesis for reference and verification). Finally, my presentations at conferences and frequent consultation with my supervisors regarding data collection and analysis contributed to enhancing the confirmability of this study.

3.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in this study. It argued for the relevance of CDST as the theoretical framework, which covered the emergence of CDST as a research approach to second language acquisition, its methodological principles and methods used for examining second/foreign language learning as a complex dynamic system. The chapter has also justified the research methods used for this study drawing on a CDST perspective. In particular, foreign language learner resilience seen as a complex dynamic system was examined retrodictively by identifying its typical patterns from which the system's components were traced back. Accordingly, this study employed purely qualitative data collection methods which included focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the CDST perspective, thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis as the method allows for both inductive and deductive data analysis. Lastly, the chapter covered measures taken to address the ethical issues and discussed the procedures followed to promote the trustworthiness of this study.

CHAPTER 4: THE SYSTEM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNER RESILIENCE: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

This chapter reports on the findings from the focus group data. Three focus groups were conducted with 13 teachers whose perspectives and experiences in teaching English at a university in Vietnam were drawn on to identify typical resilient foreign language learners. Guided by the overarching research question (What does foreign language learner resilience look like?) and the conceptual framework from the perspective of CDST, this section focuses on presenting eight typical resilient foreign language learner types which can be seen as possible outcomes/ "attractor states" of the dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience. These outcomes were labelled *determined, passion-driven, lacking self-efficacy, self-reliant, failure resistant, encouragement triggered, encouragement and assessment triggered,* and *agentive*. Although I intended to derive these labels from the participants' verbatim responses to the final question in the focus group protocol (see Appendix D), five of them were not named explicitly by the focus group participants. Instead, they were inferred from the stories shared by the focus group participants.

4.1. Determined

The *determined* learner type was generated from descriptions characterising the pathways to success in learning English of five learners – Hoa, Phan, Quan, Tuy and Xuan (pseudonyms). While the participants did not explicitly say so, their comments and descriptions about these learners indicate that these learners had shown their determination to succeed in learning English while being affected by socioeconomic adversity.

In particular, it appears salient in the focus group data that the learners categorised as *determined* were described as having experienced socioeconomic challenges such as coming from poor families or living in remote and disadvantaged rural areas. For example, as recalled by Tuong and Yen in focus group one, their learners, Hoa and Xuan, either "came from a far and remote area" or "lived in a [northern] mountainous . . . disadvantaged rural area" (FG1). Hien, in focus group two, had quite a similar description of Phan, yet she added a little more detail about this learner's familial circumstance: "[H]e was born into a poor family with a lot of siblings" (FG2). Two other learners, Tuy and Quan were also described as having similar socio-cultural situations to the ones above.

Such a socio-cultural context inherently led to difficulties that had a direct influence on these learners' English learning processes. Yen, the teacher participant in focus group two, though,

did not expound on the difficulties; he assumed that the difficulties that confronted his learner "were mostly to deal with the limited resources or facilities". In the same vein, Tuong stated that living in a remote area led to the fact that Hoa "had had little access to learning English before entering university . . . [and] little access to resources that might support her language learning such as computers, dictionaries or smartphones" (FG1).

Despite the above mentioned socioeconomic adversity, all five learners were described as having become successful English language school teachers or university lecturers. Indeed, it was noted that one of them had earned his doctoral degree from an overseas university. The achievements of these learners were seen to have derived from the individual learner's initiative to take action with a clear purpose and consistent focus on that purpose. These characteristics were reflected throughout the participants' comments in focus groups one and two.

In such contextual difficulties, these learners were described as having taken the initiative in seeking support or making the most of resources or opportunities available for their learning. Xuan, for example, was said to have "[taken] advantage of every opportunity he could have to improve himself." Or, as in the case of Tuy, he took the initiative to take advantage of the teacher's support by "always complet[ing] the writing assignments more than [the teacher's] expectation and turn[ing] in two or three pieces of writings for corrective feedback while he only needed to do one piece of writing". Tuy's ability to make a decision and act on his own seemed to be affirmed by another participant who had come to know him as a colleague when she stated that "[h]e realized his own difficulties and managed to overcome and find the most appropriate solution to each of his problems." (FG1). Bypassing the contextual difficulties that led to limited learning resources, Hoa seemed to have had unique behaviours to afford her own learning which also indicated her initiative to take action to overcome difficulties. Tuong recalled:

> She told me that she practised her English speaking skill by talking to herself. Sometimes she even spoke to a lizard on the ceiling. She wrote her diary in English. Whatever she wanted to write during a day, she used English. For example, she used English to write her daily shopping list. (FG1)

The fact that the learners took the initiative in and were even more responsible for their learning was seen to have originated from the learners' sense of purpose. Focus group data revealed that the learners of this type tended to have nurtured some desires or hopes which then had driven them to put a great deal of effort into their English learning. For example, Tuy was described

by Ngoc, a teacher participant in focus group one and also his colleague in the past, as having had "a clear goal to achieve". Although this comment did not clarify a particular purpose of Tuy – the learner, Ngoc's previous description of Tuy as "the type of person who has a thirst of knowledge, is always self-motivated without being urged by anyone" contributed to the justification for Tuy's sense of purpose. In other words, it must have been Tuy's "clear goal to achieve" that typified him as Ngoc described him. More evidence for the sense of purpose of these learners can be found in the descriptions of other learners, including Xuan, Phan and Quan. However, there seemed to be a common assumption among the focus group participants that these learners wanted to have a better future than their current poverty which linked directly with the socio-economic condition of their families and hometowns. In particular, Xuan was described as having "always thought about how to make progress and catch up with friends" but the motive behind this thinking was that "he had a strong desire to be successful [and] to get rid of poverty and difficulties" (FG1). Similarly, Phan and Quan were presumed to have gained their impetus to sustain and succeed in learning English because "they wanted to gain a social status higher than that of a farmer family [and] wanted to have a career so that they were able to define themselves in society" (FG2)

In general, the *determined* learner type was generated from focus group data as one of the possible outcomes of the system of foreign language learner resilience. It was frequently stated in the focus group data that contextual difficulties were seen as the source of energy that turned the gears in the system of resilience of these learners. In particular, adverse socio-economic conditions such as living in disadvantaged and remote areas or being born into poor families were assumed to have had an impact on these learners' learning processes. The participants' comments and descriptions also indicate that in such socio-cultural circumstances, such characteristics as initiative, purposefulness, and consistent focus on purpose were salient in the learners' pathways to success in learning English despite contextual challenges. In essence, the learners categorised as *determined* were described to be well aware of their difficulties, yet showed their determination to transcend socioeconomic adversity and succeed by transforming the challenges into motivation to strive for a future better than what they could possibly have imagined.

4.2. Passion driven

The *passion driven* learner type was identified as another typical outcome of the system of resilience in foreign language learning. While the *determined* learner type seemed common in the focus group data as it represented five learners with relatively similar contextual

backgrounds and personal characteristics, the *passion driven* learner-type outcome was generated from data about the learning pathway of only one learner – Hang (pseudonym) who was discussed in focus group one. This learner type was drawn from the discussion of how this learner had surpassed her crisis with a strong emotional investment in English language in combination with the characteristic of resourcefulness. Hang was described as having experienced a crisis leading to a disruption in her learning process. However, because of her passion for English which was later ignited by a teacher of English, she regained the momentum to continue and succeed in learning the language.

According to Doan, Hang had difficulties in adapting herself to a new learning environment. She enrolled in a university which was considered high-ranking in central Vietnam to study English as a major. Hang's decision seemed to have been influenced by her parents' expectation as Doan claimed that "Hang's parents wanted her to study in a high-quality learning environment". However, she quit after just one semester, "overwhelmed and stressed by the learning requirements of the course". Expounding on the challenges that Hang had been facing, Doan said: "she was not familiar with the new learning environment at the university where she was assigned a big load of assignments by the teachers, which put a lot of pressure on her".

The disruption of her learning did not last long. Although she no longer chose English as a major, "she continued learning [it]" because "she still had a great passion for English". Doan recounted:

> She [Hang] told me that even when she returned home after one year from the university where she had been studying English as a major and re-enrolled in the Business Management course at the university in her hometown, she was still interested in learning English. (FG1)

Hang's passion for English was actually stirred up when "she met a teacher who inspired her . . . to start learning the language [again] from scratch" by talking with her about "the difficulties that she had been facing in learning English". She was also described as having "set her goal to take the IELTS test". Because of the fact that "she was always looking for a scholarship to study abroad", setting the goal to take the IELTS test was likely to be seen as her first step to prepare for her long-term plan – studying abroad. Since then, her English learning seemed to be guided by emotional investment in an imagined identity as either an overseas student or a member of an English speaking community on the internet. Doan recollected:

> She was always looking for a scholarship to study abroad. She searched on the websites of the overseas Vietnamese students studying in different countries in the world. She shared with me recently that she has been using Skype to find foreign friends to practice her English speaking skill. She also sings English songs. I happen to know recently that she has found a Dutch partner. (FG1)

The behaviours of immersing herself in cyberspace to improve her English such as "[chatting] with foreigners online [or making] video calls with foreigners" also indicate her resourcefulness in learning. This characteristic was later asserted by Doan's comment: "Hang made the most of all affordances available to her such as teachers and/or the internet."

The description of Hang's learning trajectory shows the dynamism of the factors involved in the shaping of the *passion driven* outcome of the system of resilience in foreign language learning. Focus group data indicate that the factors attributed to this learner-type outcome included an array of emotions which were invoked by contextual factors. The learner was first described as having negative feelings such as being overwhelmed or under pressure due to socio-cultural factors in a new learning environment. Despite her passion for English, the learner did not really make remarkable changes until this positive emotion was fueled by a teacher who can be seen as one of the contextual factors triggering the system of resilience in foreign language learning. From then on the learner started to invest emotionally in learning English to be able to study abroad. This emotional investment spurred her resourcefulness in learning English which eventually helped her sustain and succeed in learning English.

4.3. Lacking self-efficacy

The analysis of focus group data indicated that the system of foreign language learner resilience settled into an outcome that I labelled *lacking self-efficacy.* This learner-type outcome links to the data about Trong (pseudonym), a learner discussed in focus group two. He was noticed as an example of a resilient English language learner because "he always tried his best and performed outstandingly" (Tran, FG2) despite struggling with negative feelings of inferiority. Trong was described as "being passionate about English and travelling" which was also considered as the justification for dropping out after two years studying Biology to re-enrol in an undergraduate programme in English language. However, in the focus group data, it was salient that a lack of confidence turned out to be attributable to moving him forward in his language learning.

The fact that Trong dropped out from his undergraduate programme in Biology and chose to study English suggests that he had a strong emotional investment in English. However, re-starting his undergraduate programme was seen by Tran, the teacher participant in focus group two, as both a challenge and an advantage to Trong's learning process. On one hand, his re-enrollment as a first-year student majoring in English brought about the negative feelings of inferiority, likely to be described as low self-esteem. This learner's characteristic was reflected in Tran's description when she stated:

> His profile shared publicly on Facebook says that he is a final year student. I guess he tries to conceal his status [of being a freshman] because he feels ashamed of that compared to his friends [of the same age] . . . it could be to deal with the belatedness in his study. (FG2)

On the other hand, the incident highly motivated him to "put learning as the top priority" because "he want[ed] to graduate at the same time as his friends of the same age". Tran also explained further that "he always moved one step ahead [by registering] for subjects prescribed for the upper-year students in the training programme."

In summary, it can be inferred from the data that the lacking self-efficacy learner type, typically characterised by the learner's feeling of inferiority, is likely to be seen as an outcome of the system of foreign language learner resilience. While emotional investment in the language seemed to kick-start the learner's English learning process, his negative feeling of inferiority leading to a lack of self-confidence was the catalyst for the system of resilience to operate and keep the learner moving forward.

4.4. Self-reliant

The *self-reliant* learner-type outcome was identified as another possible variation of the system of foreign language learner resilience from the focus group data about an individual learner, Hoan (pseudonym). The descriptions of this learner's characteristics and behaviours were the basis for the generation of the *self-reliant* learner-type outcome. Similar to Trong, whose English language learning was ascribed as the *lacking self-efficacy* outcome of the system of resilience, Hoan was described as having had an impressive performance in learning English despite having transferred from another field of study. What especially had drawn more attention to this learner were his behaviours and aspects of his personality which were considered "eccentric" by the participants in focus group two. These behaviours and aspects of

personality were also perceived by the participants as psychologically-derived challenges confronting Hoan in his learning process.

The behaviours and aspects of personality that were ascribed to his eccentricity included "not having friends or particular hobbies, except watching subtitled movies" (Hien, FG2), "being not very sociable" (Tran, FG2), "sitting alone at the same place in the classroom . . . [or] not greeting teachers" (Le, FG2) and "interrupting lectures to present his own ideas" (Ho, FG2). Although these behaviours, except for not being sociable, are considered impolite in Vietnamese classroom culture, the teacher participants seemed to have compromised on such inappropriateness. For example, Ho commented:

> I taught his class when he was in his first year. I often asked students to work in groups, but Hoan refused to do so and said that he just did not like working in groups. I did not blame him for that and let him work the way he wanted.

As an advisor, Tran showed a deeper understanding of Hoan's characteristics when she said:

> I taught writing skills to this class and sometimes he suddenly stood up and presented his opinions about something while others were concentrating on the assigned writing task. Unless the teachers knew and understood him, they would not be able to accept such behaviour or agree with his opinions and would probably say, "No. Sit down, please". (FG2)

To justify Tran's attitude, Hien explained:

> I think his family has some problem as I surmised when he shared with me some personal information. He said he lived with his mother and he had to take care of the shopping and cooking in the family. (FG2)

Hoan's attitude and behaviours were changing positively when his advisor decided to "appoint him to the leading position in the class". He "took part in more activities, became more sociable and helpful to classmates in learning . . . [and] undertook most of the tasks to support the learning activities of the class" (Tran, FG2). Hien commented that "it was thanks to the support, encouragement, and understanding of the teachers and his peers that helped Hoan change his eccentric behaviours and overcome the psychological difficulties". She later claimed to have always given him compliments and positive feedback.

In general, it was salient in the focus group data that Hoan's unusual behaviour was seen by the

participants as psychologically derived challenges in his learning process. Although the learner was described as having been self-reliant in learning, at the same time he tended to isolate himself from his peers, which is likely to be seen as a risk factor toward his learning. It is also noticeable from the data that the learner's unusual behaviour or psychological make-up were likely to originate from the socio-cultural context related to the transfer of his field of study or his familial background as revealed by the participants. The data also show that positive feedback and encouragement effected changes in his behaviour. Again, focus group data indicate that contextual factors such as the teachers and peers contributed to the shaping of this learner-type outcome of the system of resilience. Although the participants did not mention how the positive changes in his behaviour and attitude had played a role in sustaining or improving his English language learning, these positive behaviour and attitude are likely to contribute to the success of his language learning.

4.5. Failure resistant

The *failure resistant* learner type derived from the account of an English learner called Nam (pseudonym). His English learning trajectory was characterised by his ceaseless effort to sustain his English learning regardless of the little progress he made. Although the most rewarding achievement that he had made so far was passing the B1 level CEFR-V (a local version of a test using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages used in many Vietnamese universities) with a "not-very-remarkable" result, what he had performed during the process of learning was described as being resistant to failure by his teacher, Ngoc, who was also the participant in focus group one.

Nam was described as a student of veterinary medicine, learning English as a subject in the training programme toward his degree. "His English level was very low" which Ngoc assumed to have originated from the fact that "his English language learning at high school did not lay a good foundation". His low level of English proficiency was reflected in the fact that "he committed a lot of grammatical errors typically similar to one at a very early stage of foreign language learning".

Despite his low level of proficiency, data analysis indicated that Nam "showed an enquiring mind" which also made him become quite a resourceful person. Ngoc recounted:

> He often looked for books [about English] to read or talked to teachers about his difficulties. He used Messenger to chat with me. For example, he might ask "I have found this book. Do you think it is useful for me?". In general, he consulted the teacher

> frequently in his learning process. He was also willing to answer questions raised by the teacher during class time, yet his answers to the questions did not get to the point very often. . . . He managed to sustain his learning by consulting the teachers and looking for learning resources/materials so that he could be able to rise above himself. (FG1)

His constant knowledge enquiry, however, did not often help him receive positive results in his language learning. These undesirable results could have demotivated or prevented him from moving on with English, yet he kept trying. Ngoc argued:

> Many students I know, tend to give up trying when they have tried their best to learn the language but still fail to do so because they think they don't have a good foundation and will not be able to learn the language. However, in the case of Nam, for example, while he had a very low level of English and often received unsatisfactory results despite making an effort, he did not give up.

To sum up, the focus group data shows that the system of foreign language learner resilience is likely to settle into an outcome labelled *failure resistant.* As emerged from the data, failure resistance was the noticeable feature that represents the constant effort of the learner to sustain his English learning despite undesirable results. It is also worth noting from the data that a low level of proficiency in English due to high school language learning background was seen by the participant as the challenge that triggered the process of shaping the failure resistant learner-type outcome. In addition, among the factors mentioned above, data analysis also indicated that the learner's resourcefulness in seeking affordances for his learning, including the teacher, books, and cyberspace (Messenger) did make a significant contribution to the forming of this settled state of the system of foreign language learner resilience.

4.6. Encouragement triggered

The *encouragement triggered* learner-type outcome links with the learning trajectory of Hoang (pseudonym), a learner discussed in focus group three. The label of the outcome was taken from a participant's verbatim response to the final question in the focus group protocol (see Appendix F) which asked the participants to categorise or label the types of learners they discussed. According to Tong, a teacher participant in focus group three, Hoang could be classified as "a type of learner that needs encouragement". She added that "[s]he would take the initiative in her learning as long as she received encouragement". In fact, focus group data reveals that Hoang had been successful in English language learning, which is reflected in the fact that "she is now an English language teacher at a primary school". She was also considered a resilient

English language learner because she had been able to overcome emotional difficulties originating from her socio-economic background by taking advantage of the encouragement from her peers and teacher during the learning process.

Hoang was described as "hav[ing] a lower starting point compared to her classmates". To clarify the phrase "lower starting point", Tong explained that "she came from a poor and disadvantaged area, home to a minority ethnic group of which she was a member. She sounded different from Kinh people [the majority ethnic group in Vietnam]". This, as a result, led to Tong's interpretation that the learner might have had difficulties in acquiring English when she recounted:

> I taught her English speaking skill and I remember once I taught some functional English and explained over and over the use of that item of language. While many other students were able to use the language, she still could not. At the end of that class session, she came up to me and cried. She told me that she could not really understand what I said in the lecture and expressed her intention to give up on learning English because she felt that she was unable to catch up with others in her class. (FG3)

The excerpt above also signifies that the learner seemed to be emotional as she cried when sharing her situation. This negative emotion was reaffirmed in the following comments:

> [Hoang] was quite emotional. Whenever she found herself unproductive or ineffective in pair work or group work, she burst into tears. She just cried when she was not able to do what other people could. [Or] she was quiet and shy. Whenever she was asked something, her face got red and she would probably burst into tears after a while talking. (FG3)

Expounding on the origin of Hoang's emotional behaviours, Tong presumed that the learner might have felt inferior about her socio-economic circumstances as she said:

> I think it was because coming from a poor background, studying away from home and suffering from financial difficulty that made her feel a bit inferior to others.

While her poverty and difficulty in terms of her emotions described above seemed to hinder her English language learning, encouragement from the teacher and her peers appeared to uplift her emotions and her learning. As shown in focus group data, Hoang was observed to have "adapted herself better in her second year". In terms of her emotions, she was described as "being calmer" which was represented in the fact that "her face did not get red and she no longer cried as she

used to". In addition, Tong assumed that "[Hoang] could have studied really hard at home, which helped her regain confidence gradually", which can also be inferred as her resourcefulness. According to Tong, the key factor that led to these positive changes was "the encouragement from the teacher and her friends who showed goodwill and on whom she could count". She further argued for the benefit of the encouragement toward Hoang's learning by saying that "if someone had criticised or despised her, given her negative feedback, or done something that made her feel lacking confidence, she would have given up on her study."

To sum up, from the above account of the learner, the *encouragement triggered* learner-type outcome is likely to be seen as a typical outcome of the system of resilience in foreign language learning. The focus group data shows the re-organisation of interactive factors coming from both the context and the learner. As revealed in the data, the low socio-economic status, seen as a contextual factor, influenced her and led her to an unhappy feeling and inferiority complex. These factors are likely to be seen as hindrances to her learning. Whereas, encouragement from teachers and peers were found to have effected changes in terms of uplifting her spirit, which then helped her make progress in her language learning.

4.7. Encouragement and assessment triggered

The *encouragement and assessment triggered* learner type also emerged from the analysis of focus group data as another attractor state of the system of foreign language learner resilience. Similar to the *encouragement triggered* learner type, the labelling of this learner-type outcome was extracted from the participants' account of Tan, a learner discussed in focus group three. He was a student of Land Management, studying English as a requirement in his training programme toward his degree. Tan was seen as a typical example of a resilient English language learner who managed to sustain, make progress in learning English and pass the test of English module three (one of the four English modules prescribed in the training programme of his discipline) which he had not been able to do in the previous semesters due to his extremely low level of English.

According to Thi, Tan's level of English "was almost zero". Thi said that she happened to know about his English level when she called on him to read aloud in English. Tan was described as having difficulty with English pronunciation as Thi claimed that "[i]f I asked him to read out loud a text, he would hardly be able to pronounce the words correctly". As she wanted to help Tan, she asked him about his English learning background and found that "he studied at a high school in the countryside where English language learning was paid less attention."

Additionally, “he neglected learning English, but put the focus on studying subjects belonging to educational block A or B [which did not require English] to prepare for the university entrance examination”. As a result, “he had to start learning English from scratch at university level.”

Despite these difficulties, Tan was described as having positive learning behaviours which were represented by the fact that “he was attending class regularly and was extremely hard working”. Expounding on the effort that Tan had made in overcoming his own difficulties, Thi commented as follows:

> English 3 module [the module Thi was teaching] includes some conversational language students are expected to reproduce in the speaking test, so I personally think that he must have made a lot of effort to be able to internalise the bits of language so that he could pass the test.

Although Thi acknowledged the learner’s effort to sustain and make progress in learning English, she also claimed that she “often asked him about his learning” and her support, encouragement and on-going assessment made a contribution to his achievement in English. She recounted:

> I was worried about him and asked him how he would manage to do the speaking test afterward and how he had managed to pass the English 1 and 2 modules tests. He told me that he actually had failed the tests. Then I helped him with his English pronunciation and the sentence structures that he might use in the next speaking test. I asked him to practise at home and went over the lesson with him in the next class session. I kept doing this over and over. He got D in the English 3 module test which was not a very good mark, but he finally made it over in the subject that he could not have done in the previous semesters. (FG3)

In responding to the interview question that asked the teacher participants to classify the learners discussed, Thi seemed to reaffirm the role of encouragement and assessment in helping the learner overcome the challenges in learning English. She supposed that “[i]f the teacher paid attention to him, encouraged him and called him up to check his homework, he would definitely perform well; otherwise he wouldn’t.”

Although this outcome of the system of resilience in foreign language learning was labelled encouragement and assessment triggered, the focus group data indicate that the forming of this

attractor state of the system involved the interaction of a number of factors. The system was actually generated by the learner's low level of English which was described to have derived from the English language learning background at high school. Although the data reveal little about the learner's initiative or resourcefulness in learning, such descriptions about the learner as being hard-working or attending class regularly are likely to be seen as individual factors contributing to shaping the outcome. As shown from the data, encouragement and assessment were seen as the key factors that helped the system settle into encouragement and assessment triggered learner-type outcome.

4.8. Agentive

The *agentive* learner-type outcome of the system of foreign language learner resilience refers back to the English language learning pathway of Chan, who was discussed in focus group three. His resilience in English language learning was described as being characterised by personal characteristics such as initiative, resourcefulness or independence. Although Kim, the teacher participant, commented that she did not think that Chan was "an outstanding student, but he was good enough [to be seen as an example of resilient English language learner]."

According to Kim (the teacher participant), Chan was a student of Biology. Like many university non-English major students in Vietnam, Chan was required to learn English as a requirement in the curriculum. However, as Kim recalled, "He was different from many other students because he had not learned English at high school" which led to "his anxiety in the first class session".

It seemed that Chan was aware of the difficulties he might face in learning the language so that he "took initiative to approach [the teacher] and share with [her] his difficulties". Kim recalled:

> He told me that he would have to struggle a lot to learn English with other students who had already known something about English while he had no English learning background.

Although Kim did not give him a lot of advice except to say that "it would depend mostly on his effort and he could not rely totally on anyone else", Chan was described as having shown his resourcefulness since then. His resourcefulness was reflected in the fact that "he chose to sit in the front row of the class so that he could be paid more attention to by the teacher". According to Kim, such behaviour indicated that "he was fully aware that he would face a lot more difficulties than others in learning English and he had his own plan to overcome the challenges."

It was thanks to his initiative and resourcefulness that he received more support from the teacher and even from a peer. Kim recounted:

> [I]t was fortunate that he sat next to another student who was also willing to help him in English classes. I also paid more attention to his learning by asking the student sitting next to him about him.

To sum up, although this learner-type outcome was labelled drawing on the characteristics that were seen as salient in the data, the process of this learner's resilience in learning English involved different factors sequentially related to each other. First, it was found in the data that the learner did not have access to English language learning at high school which can be seen as a risk factor emerging from the socio-cultural context. This factor led to his negative feelings of anxiety because of his self-awareness of the difficulties confronting him in the process of learning. Also from the focus group data, in such a disadvantageous circumstance, the learner chose to take the initiative to find a way forward by seeking support from the teacher. His English language learning was seen to be successful which was reflected in the fact that "his marks that he received for each English test he took in each semester ranged from 6 to 7 [over 10], although he had started to learn the language from scratch."

4.9. Summary

As outlined above, this section aims to respond to the question "What do resilient students look like?" drawing on the experiences of the teacher participants of three focus group interviews. So far, the analysis of the focus group data from the perspective of CDST has revealed eight possible outcomes of the system of foreign language learner resilience which linked closely with the learning trajectories of the 13 learners and their pathways to sustain and/or succeed in English learning. Although the labelling of these learner-type outcomes was based on either the salient themes that emerged from the data or the verbatim responses of the participants, each learner-type outcome of the system of resilience in foreign language learning, as revealed from the data, actually represents a dynamic process of interaction of different contextual and individual factors sequentially tied to each other. It can also be seen from the above analysis that there were overlapping descriptions of the learners representing the system outcomes. In other words, it appears from the participants' accounts that some features attributed to one learner-type outcome may feed into the formation of another which is likely to be seen as the process of re-organisation of the system after the non-linear interaction of the factors. In brief, the analysis of focus group data has provided us a systemic view of foreign language learner

resilience from the teachers' perspectives and experience, which can contribute to a deeper exploration of the concept from the perspectives of the students who identified themselves as resilient foreign language learners.

CHAPTER 5: THE SYSTEM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNER RESILIENCE: FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

This chapter reports on the findings from interviews with 17 first-year English major students who self-identified as having been able to improve or sustain their English learning, irrespective of difficulties and/or challenges. It presents the students' perception of the challenges and the favourable aspects that respectively constrained and promoted their English learning process. In particular, it aims to identify two groups of interactive factors – *risk and protective factors* that illuminate the student participants' developmental processes of resilience in learning English by looking back at their learning trajectories. Risk and protective factors reported in this study are viewed as intertwined elements characterising the ongoing development of foreign language resilience of the above-mentioned participants. Underpinning the present study is the perspective of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) in which context is seen as part of the system of foreign language learner resilience. Interview data is thus analysed in such a way that reflects the interplay between contextual and individual aspects as two intertwined subsystems in a whole system of resilience. In light of this, the description of individual factors will be embedded in the contextual ones, which were likely to have derived from the aspects of context mediated through the participants' interaction with the socio-economic settings, institutions and families that they are a part of.

5.1. First-year students' perception of risk factors

The analysis of interview data indicated that the students' perceptions of risk factors include both contextual and individual factors. As the student participants described their internal factors detrimental to their learning process in relation to different aspects of context, the risk factors will be presented in a way that attempts to capture the complexity of the interaction between the individual and contextual factors. In addition, as the participants described factors negatively influencing their English language learning across time (from the beginning of their English language learning up to the time of the interviews), the temporal aspect of the data on risk factors will also be reported in an attempt to reinforce my conceptualisation of resilience in this study as a developmental process.

5.1.1. Constraints related to society and community contexts

Thirteen out of 17 first-year student participants found their English learning process vulnerable to aspects of the social settings where they had grown up and studied before their enrolment at university. Describing their backgrounds, most students asserted that they had grown up and

spent most of their school lives in either rural or remote and disadvantaged areas in the central highland provinces of Vietnam while only three of them said that they had been living in urban areas since childhood.

5.1.1.1. Limited or delayed learning opportunities due to socio-economic conditions and geographical distance

Describing challenges hindering their English learning opportunities because of geographical and/or socio-economic factors, four students affirmed having come from remote and disadvantaged areas. They tended to use expressions that emphasised the remoteness and the socio-economic disadvantages of their hometowns. Talking about the difficulties, Hoang, Hoai, and Vy used words or phrases such as "poor district", "yet-to-be-developed" or "developing area" in addition to "remote" or "rural" to describe their places of origin. Hoang, for example, said that she came from "a rural district"; and because it was "a remote area of which the socio-economic condition has yet to be developed", she had "not [been] offered English language learning up until starting lower secondary education". In the same vein, Hoai claimed that she had "[grown] up in one of the poor districts of the province where English education was little-developed". Despite being a bit more positive than other participants when describing her place of origin as "developing", Vy stated:

> I was born and grew up in KN district [a rural district of a central highland province] - a remote area. Although it was developing, there were limited learning opportunities for English learners compared to those living in other [urban] areas. English learners still faced a lot of difficulties.

Although Ni did not explicitly confirm the remoteness of her hometown, she talked about the challenges she had experienced and compared herself with her friends:

> I feel less fortunate than my friends who come from the city. While they started learning English at Grade 3, I wasn't able to have access to English learning until I started Grade 5, let alone the limited resources and facilities of the schools.

Ngoc, another student in this cohort, reported having been brought up in KP, a rural district in a Central Highlands province. While she conceded, "I don't think there were any hindrances", she compared what she had experienced at schools in her hometown and her assumption about the opportunities a high school student in the city might have had:

> It [her hometown] was not as well-developed as other places. Schools here offered English learning, but not as much as schools in the city. . . . . Students in the city have more opportunities to learn and practise English with each other, so they will have better speaking skills. I think rural places like my hometown did not offer such opportunities.

It is also important to take into account the social aspect reflected in Ngoc's comment about the shortage of English teachers at her lower secondary school. She recollected:

> Talking about the interest in learning English, I don't think the condition in my hometown was good enough for it to develop. As it [the hometown] was not developed, schools here were short of English teachers. There were about one or two English teachers in each school. Furthermore, the teachers did not hold official permanent positions. By the time their contract terminated, they still had not been able to learn about their students.

As it appears in Ngoc's description above, the disadvantage in terms of the socio-economic conditions could have had an impact on schools that possibly led to difficulties or challenges to English language learners living in the area.

It was interesting to find that not only did students from rural or remote areas make claims about the disadvantages in terms of access to English learning, those living in urban areas of a central highland province of Vietnam also felt that they had experienced difficulties in seeking opportunities to learn English. This can be illustrated by the cases of Bich, My and Nha. For example, Bich said: "I lived about four or five kilometres away from BH town centre . . . [but] there was hardly any English language centre here [in the town]". Similarly, both My and Nha, growing up in the city where their university campus was based, implied their disappointment in their comments about their hometowns. While Nha commented briefly that "learning opportunity here [her hometown] was limited and [she] had to rely mostly on self-study", My tended to be more explicit in her description. My said: "Before 2007 [when she was in high school], I was not able to spot a foreign language centre in this city. . . . The socio-economic condition here could be seen as a constraint to learners because there were fewer alternatives to choose from in terms of learning opportunity compared to other areas."

5.1.1.2. Lack of an environment for authentic English communication practice

It is also important to highlight that some students in the interviews seemed to attribute the lack of an environment for authentic communication in English to the unfavourable geographical

and socio-economic conditions of their hometowns. This was reflected in the comments of five students in the interviews. These five students assumed that communicating in English with (native) English speakers was essential for their language learning, but their hometowns had not offered such a favourable environment for them to practise or learn the language. Trang, for example, assumed that her "limited opportunity to communicate with foreigners" was because of the fact that "the tourist industry [of her hometown] was not well-developed". May, Vy, Ni and Xuan believed that the remoteness of their hometowns prevented them from approaching foreigners who speak the language. For instance, Vy and Xuan concurred when they respectively stated that it was due to living in "a remote area" and "rural district" that "deprived [them] of the opportunity to communicate with foreigners." Similarly, while May said that English learners like her had "not [had] an environment to communicate in English because there were very few foreigners" in her hometown, Ni expressed frustration in her comment as follows:

> I think it is important for someone to have the opportunity to communicate with native speakers of the foreign language s/he is learning. However, I could never see any foreigners in my hometown.

5.1.1.3. Lack of a supportive and engaging learning environment

The disadvantages in terms of geographical distance and socio-economic conditions were not the only challenges perceived by the students as having hindered their learning process. The majority of the students seemed to believe that their desire for a supportive and encouraging environment to learn and practise English had not been met seemingly due to the lack of engagement and/or motivation in (English) learning. According to the students, this attitude was present among the local people, at schools in their hometowns and even within the students themselves. The following responses of the first-year student participants can be seen as typical illustrations for this theme.

Talking about his learning experience when he was a high school student, Ba explained:

> Local people living in my place (about 20 kilometres from the city centre) are mostly ethnic minorities who tend not to take learning [English] seriously. As I studied in such an unfavourable environment where people did not take learning seriously, I thought that I was really good and I did not have to make more effort to excel. This seemed to pull me back because if I had studied in a more competitive learning environment where

> I could have competed with students better than me, I would have had to try harder so that I could have been at least as good as them.

Ba's explanation reflects his disappointment at having his learning affected by the discouraging surrounding derived from the local people's lack of engagement in learning. This learning environment could have contributed to the challenges he faced learning English at the university level because later in the interview he mentioned "learn[ing] in an unfavourable environment" as one of the features characterising him as a typical English language learner in terms of overcoming challenges in the learning process.

Hoai shared the same assumption as Ba about the lack of engagement in the English learning of the local people. She said: "my peers in high school were mostly local ethnic minority people who did not take foreign language [English] learning seriously. Their [English] levels were very low." Her comments seemed to imply frustration at having been learning English in an unstimulating environment. Such a feeling of frustration can also be noticed in Dai's learning experience as a high school student in his hometown, regarding the lack of motivation in learning English of the local people, resulting in an unstimulating environment in which he had managed to learn English:

> First of all, no one here [his hometown] was interested in learning English. Everyone seemed to underestimate English language learning. As a result, there was no one with whom I could practise my English. I could not find anyone to form a group in which we could possibly exchange or share knowledge with each other. If I ever wanted to practise the language, I had to do it by myself.

As shown in the above students' descriptions, the lack of engagement and motivation leading to the unstimulating and unfavourable English learning environment had been present not just among local (ethnic minority) people but also among the students in the local high schools. This was also experienced by Bich and Thi, who respectively said:

> Apart from the lack of an encouraging environment, it seemed that my classmates at high school did not really want to learn English as they believed it [English] was a difficult subject to learn. This also made the teacher feel frustrated in their teaching.

and

> Among my friends at school, I could hardly find anyone who was really interested in learning English. . . . In general, the awareness of English language of people in my

> place was very limited; I mean, I was surrounded by very few people who were interested in learning the language.

It should also be noted that while the above student participants tended to blame the lack of engagement and motivation of their peers for having failed to promote a favourable environment for them to learn English, some others admitted that they had not been engaged in English learning at high school. Nha commented that "English language education was not my first choice for undergraduate study. . . . I did not place much emphasis on learning English because it was not one of the subjects required for my enrolment in the course I intended to take". In a similar vein, Vy admitted that "I did not take English learning very seriously as I did not intend to choose English as a major for my undergraduate study." Ni, adding to her earlier comment on the shortage of resources for English learning at her high school, admitted: "I did not have a passion for [learning] English, so I was not aware much of the challenges".

Although the participants' lack of engagement in English learning could have had to do with their personal interests, it could also be thought of as an outcome of the unfavourable settings of their hometowns, including the environment in local schools that had failed to engage them in learning English. This is reflected in their comments on how English had been taught and the learning environment at their local high schools. Ni explained: "If we want to learn something, we need to have an interest in it. However, what I learned at school was just about grammar." Likewise, Vy seemed to express her dissatisfaction with a detailed description of her English learning experience at high school as follows:

> At high school, the teacher taught traditionally and focused more on grammar - almost no language skills. While speaking and listening skills were not emphasised, the listening skill was still assessed. At Grade 12, in a test, we were assessed on four language skills although the emphasis during the learning process was still placed on grammar. Learning materials were only the textbook. The teacher did not suggest any further materials. Moreover, the teacher seemed frustrated because of the students' laziness. It was like, the teacher lost his enthusiasm after a while because students tended to get involved in their own stuff without paying attention to the lesson, although he was enthusiastic at the beginning.

Nha's, Vy's and Ni's lack of engagement and motivation in learning English at high school had turned into a drawback for them. They faced more challenges in later stages of English learning because they had not prepared well enough in terms of their English language skills and

knowledge. They all found themselves vulnerable in the undergraduate training programme and had had to "start [learning English] all over again".

Further analysis of the learning environment at high school will be discussed below to see the complexity of the interaction between the individual factors and the institutional contexts. However, the above analysis about the lack of engagement and motivation indicates the feedback loop between the participants' individual factors and the aspects of the social settings where they had grown up and studied. More specifically, while the students blamed the unfavourable learning environment in their hometowns for their lack of engagement and motivation, the students' lack of engagement and motivation could also have contributed to generating such an environment. This reflects the interaction between the students' internal factors and their environment

In summary, the first-year participants found their English learning opportunities restricted or delayed due to the disadvantages in terms of the geographical distance and socio-economic conditions of their hometowns. Also, they reported having been surrounded by an unstimulating or unsupportive environment resulting from a lack of engagement and motivation in (English) learning among local people and students. Their perceptions of the challenges were closely related to the social realities of their hometowns; they reflect the interaction between the participants and societal entities, including humans (the local people and their peers), the socio-economic conditions of their hometowns, and institutions (the local schools). It was interesting to find that while some participants tended to attribute the lack of engagement and motivation to the unfavourable learning environment, some seemed to personalise it as their own failing which might have contributed to creating that environment. Their views can be illustrated by a feedback loop between the participants' individual factors and the aspects of the social settings where they had grown up and studied (see Figure 5.1 below). This, again, reflects the reciprocal relationship between the individual factors and contextual ones.

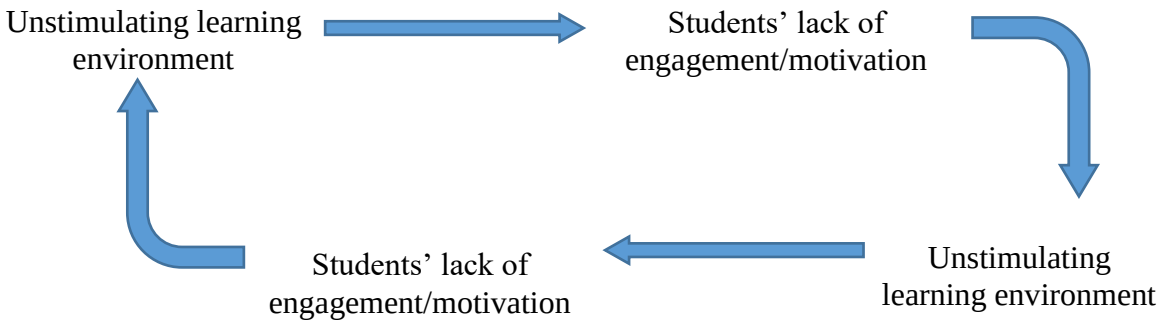

Figure 5.1: Contextual-individual factors feedback loop

The above findings about the perceptions of challenges and difficulties in relation to the social settings of the first-year student participants' hometowns have revealed the risk factors as perceived by the students through their interaction with one aspect of the multiple contexts they had experienced. The next section will delve into the interaction between the first-year student participants and their families in order to uncover the risk factors emerging from the familial aspects of context.

5.1.2. Constraints related to familial issues

In contrast to the difficulties and challenges derived from the social settings, difficulties and challenges from families were experienced by fewer first-year student participants. In particular, four participants reported having been influenced by issues such as family dysfunction, upheavals, or parental divorce. According to these students, these familial issues had resulted in negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, and anxiety or stress which inevitably had been detrimental to their learning.

5.1.2.1. Family dysfunction as a constraint

Describing his family background, Ba talked at length about his family dysfunction due to the conflict between his mother and his two older brothers:

> I am the fifth child in a family of seven. I have three older brothers and a sister. My parents are farmers. They also own a convenience store. . . . My family sometimes had fights regarding my first two older brothers' gambling habit, which made it difficult for me to concentrate on my studies. While my father always encouraged me to learn, my mother was the one who discouraged me with words like "you don't have to study a lot". I felt as if she was worried that I would be the same as my brothers. I guessed she might be under pressure of the financial support for five children. . . . In fact, financial difficulty was not exactly the problem to my mother. She was stressed and frustrated with my first two older brothers. They used to be very intelligent students but they hung out with bad people, got addicted to gambling and eventually quit university. Whenever she had quarrels with my brothers, she turned to me and scolded: "You're going to be just like your brothers. What do you have to study a lot for?" This upset and frustrated me.

Ba's description of the issue in his family shows how this contextual risk factor had influenced him emotionally and hindered his learning. That Ba had been upset and frustrated because of

having been scolded for no reason by his mother indicates the emergence of the negative emotions out of the familial aspect of context. This provides evidence for the interrelationship between the contextual and internal factors contributing to the development of Ba's resilience in learning English.

5.1.2.2. Parental divorce and families' high expectations as hindrances

Trang, another student in this cohort, seemed to suffer from anxiety in communication (especially in English) due to being obsessed by family crises leading to her parents' divorce. Recalling crises in her family, Trang said:

> I am living with my mother. My parents lived separately when I was little. When I was in Grade 5, the relationship between my parents became worse. They officially got divorced when I was in Grade11. Previously, my mother had experienced depression which was also one of the reasons that led to the conflict between my parents. Despite the court judgment, when my father got drunk, he returned home and had fights with my mother. He used to treat us (my mother and us) really well. At present, I live with my mother who has been taking care of the three of us since her divorce . . . Now as a university student, I am somewhat interested in learning English, but due to my family's issues, I am afraid of communication. I may feel more comfortable speaking Vietnamese; however, when I have to speak in front of a lot of people in either Vietnamese or English, I cannot say a word.

Uyen, another student in the cohort, shared a similar story. Although she sounded calm, her facial expression during the interview seemed to unveil the emotional hardship she had been suffering from her family disruption. Uyen recalled:

> My father told me that he and my mum had separated when I was one year old. Although they had managed to return afterwards, they finally got divorced when I was in Grade 4. My father sent me to live with my form teacher who eventually adopted me. I have been living with my teacher's family since then. Such a family circumstance did have an influence on my learning process, including English learning. I could not really concentrate on my studies because I felt pity for myself.

In addition to family crises, families' high expectations were also perceived as a constraint. Trang, who suffered anxiety because of her parents' divorce, also felt anxious because of her family's high expectations for her success:

> My mother and uncles kept telling me things such as “it should be easier to find a good job having a good command of English”, or “it is unacceptable to retake tests”, or “learning English properly means being able to speak, read and write just like native English speakers”. Such words really put a lot of pressure on me and made me feel anxious.

5.1.2.3. Family upheaval as a constraint

Nha seemed to be the most emotional in the cohort as she could not hold back her tears talking about her family. She said, “My parents were poor migrants from the North, drifting to this city in search of a better livelihood”. Nha believed that her family still did “not have the right [economic] conditions” as her father “fell ill and could not work very much”. Nha added: “my sister got married after earning a degree in pharmacy. She has not been able to find a job yet”. She went on to say, “my mother does almost everything. She is a trader”. Her final statement about her mother seemed to imply that her mother was the breadwinner in the family. What Nha actually considered as her difficult time was when her father passed away as it was also when she had to make the decision about which university to go to as she could not enrol in a university away from home. She chose to enrol in English language education which she had not thought about during her high school education up until her father’s passing. Her decision may have derived from her concern about her mother, who she explained “has been suffering too much”. Later in the interview, she revealed: “At that time I could not leave my mother on her own. She was ageing. I was afraid that she would be very sad. There would be no one at home for her to be with.” Losing a family member, therefore, was seen as impacting both Nha and her family.

While family upheavals or dysfunction seemed to have directly influenced three aforementioned students in terms of causing negative emotions detrimental to their English learning, the case of Nha seemed more complex in terms of how her family upheaval had influenced her learning. In particular, family upheaval led to Nha’s choosing to study English language education, which was not her original intention. She admitted that during her first year at the university she struggled with her learning. She said: “I kept blaming myself for choosing to study something I didn’t really like to learn. Studying with no aim did not make me put effort into what I was studying”.

In another situation when Nha was describing how she had struggled to overcome challenges, she added another detail about the inconsistency of her mother's opinions concerning her intention to study abroad, which had also emotionally hindered her learning. Nha said:

> After the first semester in my first year, my mother seemed to recover from her grief. Thus, she suggested that I should re-take the university examination to enrol in my favourite course at a university away from home. However, at that time I had no interest in re-taking the university entrance examination but preferred to apply for scholarships to study abroad. . . . I was granted a full scholarship to study Tourism at Beijing University and a fifty per cent tuition fee scholarship to study International Relations in Canada. . . . A month before I received the result from Canada, my mother changed her mind all of a sudden, disapproving of my intention to study abroad. She gave various excuses to prevent me from studying abroad. We had a fight . . . and when I saw her cry, I gave in and decided not to go anymore. I had to let go of the two scholarship opportunities, feeling frustrated and sad. This demotivated me and made me feel like giving up.

The upheaval in Nha's family may have mediated the challenges that she encountered in learning English at the university level. Although the passing of her father eventually led to her choosing English as her major at the university, she was not really engaged in it. In addition, Nha also found herself demotivated in learning because of her mother's lack of support for her intention to study abroad, reflected in her mother's disapproval. Although Nha did not elaborate on the reasons her mother had given for her subsequent disapproval, there was a possibility that Nha's mother might not have fully recovered from the upheaval.

5.1.2.4. Families' financial difficulties as a constraint

Only one student participant, Bich, reported that her family's economic situation had restrained her from a further opportunity for English learning. As Bich said:

> My parents are farmers. . . . I feel a bit under pressure in terms of financial support. I have had few opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities due to the economic situation. . . . I could not take extra classes in the English language centre.

In summary, the interview data revealed that first-year students' English learning pathways were vulnerable to family upheavals, dysfunction or parental divorce. Prevalent in the data was an array of emotions generated from the interaction between the students and their families.

These emotions can be seen as having influenced the students' learning trajectories. The limited economic condition of some of the families was also reported to have an impact, making the students feel under pressure and limiting English learning opportunities. Although a small number of the students believed that difficulties derived from their families, the data suggested that family issues could be considered as risk factors influencing the students' English learning process.

5.1.3. Constraints related to institutional issues

Interview data revealed first-year student participants' perceptions of challenges and difficulties related to institutional aspects of context at three levels: their teachers, peers, and learning resources and facilities. It is also important to highlight that the students' learning experiences from high school concerning these three aspects were described as having not only challenged them at one stage of their learning but had also consequentially influenced the next level of their learning process. Embedded in the student participants' descriptions, psychological factors detrimental to their English learning appeared to have stemmed from their interactions mainly with other agents (teachers or peers) at school or at the university.

5.1.3.1. The students' high school learning experiences and their emotional states

Nine of 17 first-year student participants concurred that English classes at high schools had emphasised vocabulary and grammatical structures even though the coursebooks had always been designed to teach all four skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing). This teaching content seemed to have demotivated and disengaged the students from English learning and subsequently contributed to their anxiety or nervousness in learning the language at the university level. For example, Ba appeared frustrated when describing his English learning experience at high school:

> In lower and upper secondary education, little attention was paid to the development of communicative skills in English. The emphasis was placed mostly on grammar. The teacher tended to ignore the listening and speaking skills and moved on to the reading part in the coursebook.

Bich, Ni, and Ha also expressed their disappointment in sharing the same stories about their English learning experiences at high school. Bich sounded frustrated when talking about her experience: "I felt as if the teachers imposed their will on us. They kept teaching us grammatical structures and vocabulary without helping us improve our listening or speaking skills." Also,

Ni, who previously talked about her lack of engagement in learning English at the local high school, assumed that it was also because of the grammar-focused learning content at school that she was demotivated. “How could I feel interested in learning English when the teachers kept talking about grammar?” Similarly, Ha voiced her frustration at being unable to shift her focus on learning English grammar to communicative skills because of how she had been taught English at high school. She explained this in relation to her experience with her English learning at the university level:

> At high school, almost every English teacher mainly taught vocabulary and grammar. Hardly any teachers taught us listening or speaking skills. . . . Now I am a second-year student, I still tend to focus more on learning English grammar and vocabulary than speaking and listening skills, just like I was taught at high school.

Although Dai seemed to be able to justify the lack of teaching of listening and speaking skills, he was quite critical of what he had been taught at high school as he said:

> In the classroom, the teachers were supposed to follow the coursebooks, yet they skipped the listening and speaking parts, which, I think, was because they believed that these skills would never be assessed in the National High School Graduation Examination. The students had to study those skills on their own at home.

In the same vein, May recounted:

> We learned a lot about grammar and did a lot of grammatical exercises. . . so, that’s the reason why we have limited communicative skills. For example, when we met foreigners we did not know how to communicate with them; we did not know how to start a conversation. Although the coursebooks always included listening and speaking parts, the teachers just skipped those parts and moved to [grammatical] practice test activities. These practice tests were supposed to help us in the National High School Graduation Examination.

In addition to the heavily grammar-focused teaching practice at the secondary education level, the students also claimed that they felt frustrated at the inconsistency of the English knowledge and pronunciation taught by different school teachers, the monotonous teaching methods, and the limited in-class support of the teachers.

For the inconsistency of the English knowledge and especially the pronunciation of the teachers, five out of 17 interview students reported having been confused with the knowledge taught by

different teachers at various levels of secondary education. This can be illustrated by Uyen's comment: "It seemed to me that different teachers taught different English, which confused me, thus challenging to me." Other students such as Nhu, Hoang, Hoai and Ni also made similar comments. Nhu and Hoang concurred about the confusing pronunciation of their school teachers as they respectively commented as follows:

> The varied pronunciations of different teachers for the same English words made me confused. I did not know who had the right pronunciation.

and

> There was a big difference between lower and upper secondary school teachers. Teachers in my lower secondary school pronounced in one way while my teachers at high school pronounced in another. I did not really know who pronounced correctly.

Also about the teachers' English pronunciation, Hoai and Ni tended to compare the English pronunciation of their secondary school teachers with their university teachers. They both assumed that their "teachers' pronunciation at school was not correct", which they became "aware of when studying English at university level".

Furthermore, some students expressed disappointment in talking about the teaching methods of their school teachers. They concurred in describing their school teachers' teaching methods as either "traditional" or "monotonous". For example, Bich commented, "the teachers' teaching methods appeared to be traditional and there seemed to be no sign of improvement or update". Her comment also linked to her previous description of the grammar-focused English classes. It seemed then as if the traditional teaching methods had been an outcome of the grammar-focused teaching practice or the other way round. Similarly, Dai, Nhu and Ngoc shared their frustration about their learning experience with their high school teachers. In particular, Dai asserted:

> Talking about the teaching methods of my high school teachers, except for the teachers who were in charge of training gifted students [for the national exam for gifted students], all the teachers that I had studied with were quite monotonous in their teaching.

Nhu seemed to show her disappointment more clearly through her voice when she emphasised the word "boring" in her description. "Many teachers were boring. Their teaching was really boring and incomprehensible to me", Nhu said. In an effort to blame the teaching methods for her incomprehension, she added:

> During my three years at high school, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to study English with a teacher whose pronunciation, I think, was quite good. I felt all right studying with her. However, it seemed like she was so busy that she was not able to teach my class regularly. That was when I had to study with the substitute teacher whose teaching was really incomprehensible to me.

In a similar vein, Ngoc attributed her loss of inspiration for English learning to the teaching practice of teachers other than her Grade 9 English teacher:

> I started learning English when I was in Grade 9. I studied English with a teacher with whom I felt very interested in learning. Then suddenly she was transferred to another school. Afterwards, I did not find myself inspired by other teachers.

The data also identified first-year students' sense of inadequate in-class support from the teachers, which, for some students, had made them feel as if they had been unfairly treated. Ba commented: "Many teachers did not care about the students. They just tried to finish the lesson and leave the class. Hence, many of the students did not care about learning English." In a similar vein, Hoai said: "The teachers were not really enthusiastic and they seemed not to care about us."

Despite having a similar view about the inadequacy of the teachers' in-class support, Dai, Vy, Ha and Thi explained further about their views on this issue. For example, Thi reasoned: "I had the feeling that it was because I was not a gifted student that the teachers did not pay attention to me". Dai, Vy and Ha tended to give similar excuses for their sense of the lack of the teachers' in-class support. While Dai assumed that his English teacher had "put the priority on the ones who went to their [the teachers'] private extra classes", Vy believed that "students who attended extra classes had better knowledge than those who did not". In a similar vein, Ha explained:

> My knowledge of English was largely acquired through attending extra classes, . . . Within a period of class time, the content revolved around what had been prescribed in the coursebook. In case I wanted to learn more, I had to attend extra classes.

Furthermore, one student expressed her discontent with the mismatch between what she had been offered by her teacher in class and how she had been assessed afterwards. According to Vy, she had been "assessed on four language skills although the emphasis during the learning process was still placed on grammar". As such, the mismatch between the teaching and assessment can be seen as a possible risk factor derived from the interaction between the

students and their teachers in the process of English learning.

The above analysis has revealed the students' perceptions of the challenges and difficulties derived from the interaction between them and aspects of their high school learning environment. These included the heavily grammar-focused content delivered by the teachers, the inconsistent English knowledge and pronunciation of different teachers (including those of different levels of education) and the inadequate in-class support from the teachers. In the presence of these contextual difficulties, the students had experienced emotions such as discontentment, frustration, or demotivation, often known as unfavourable psychological factors for the learning process. The analysis has indicated the relationship between these contextual and emotional factors interweaving to create a subsystem of the complex system of foreign language learner resilience.

Given the system is always in a state of flux, this subsystem is expected to link with other subsystems and transform over time. This, in fact, can be evidenced in the interview data as reports of the difficulties and challenges derived from the students' learning experiences at high school had subsequently entailed other psychological states detrimental to the students' English learning at the tertiary level. These included negative emotions such as shock, anxiety or nervousness and lack of self-efficacy.

For instance, Nhu seemed to have experienced anxiety in studying English at the university as she confirmed that "the atmosphere in the listening classes was always tense". Nhu described her learning experience in the early days at the university as follows:

> I was very shocked in learning listening and speaking skills. Although my sister had spent one month helping me prepare for my university entrance examination familiarising me with speaking and listening skills by speaking or reading aloud in English at a slow speech rate, I was not able to catch up with what was said by native speakers in the recordings. I was like an alien to the learning programme at the university.

Nhu's anxiety in learning English at the university level can be seen as a consequence of having been inadequately trained in English speaking and listening skills at the secondary level. Similar emotions can also be detected in accounts of other students such as Ni, Hoang, Ngoc, and Xuan. Ni recalled: "Whenever I had listening classes, I was afraid of meeting the teacher because I could not make sense of what I heard. It put so much pressure on me". Similarly, Hoang admitted that she had been overwhelmed by the use of English for teaching by teachers

at the university as she said:

> At high school, the teachers used English or both English and Vietnamese in their teaching. The university teachers tended to use a hundred per cent English to teach, which made me feel unable to catch up. I sometimes could not understand anything.

Hoang also talked about her anxiety related to her English speaking skill. She "had the feeling of being afraid of speaking English because it is not my mother tongue". This statement was then followed by the explanation that "I was afraid of making mistakes." This could be considered to be a sign of anxiety or a lack of self-efficacy attributable to the grammar-focused teaching practice in the earlier stages of her education. Similarly, Xuan, who also attributed her anxiety in English speaking classes to her ill-trained English speaking skill at high school, explained:

> I had difficulties with English speaking skill when I started university. It was because I had not been trained to speak English at high school that I was too nervous to speak in front of the class. I was totally at a loss for words. I was afraid of speaking English. I always felt worried and insecure when I had speaking tests.

In a similar vein, Ngoc believed that she had suffered from negative emotions in the process of adapting to the new learning environment at the university:

> The changes in the learning environment at the university level caused some emotional problems to me in the process of adjusting myself. At lower levels of education, I had not had opportunities to speak English, so . . . I was not able to pronounce words properly or say something in English in a full sentence. Regarding listening skills, except for listening to my teachers' spoken English, I had not been given opportunities to listen to recordings of native speakers' voices. Hence, I felt afraid of listening skills at the beginning of my study at the university.

In addition to nervousness, a lack of self-efficacy was also detected in the interview with Ha who asserted:

> I want to speak with foreigners very much, but I have no confidence in my English speaking skill. Normally, I am a confident person. Whenever I could not speak English as my friends did, I started to feel lacking in confidence and incompetent. Gradually, it seemed that I was losing my confidence in speaking in front of people. I was not even able to outline what I should say in my presentation. I felt really lacking in self-

confidence.

Ha's lack of self-efficacy can be attributed to her English learning experience in the previous phase of her study where the focus had been on grammar as she previously said:

> Since I started learning English from primary education up to Grade 12, the teacher had mainly taught about grammar. Listening and speaking were very limited and the teacher tended to use Vietnamese in the classroom.

The above analysis of the students' negative emotions indicates the sequential interaction of different factors over time. It reflects the dynamism of the system where one subsystem sequentially links with another and ignites the ongoing interaction of subsystems within the system. The students' anxiety and lack of self-efficacy in learning English at the tertiary level can be seen as subsystems reciprocally interacting with the subsystem of challenges and difficulties derived from their high school learning experiences

5.1.3.2. The students and their university teachers

The analysis above has partly revealed students' perception of the risk factors emerging from their interaction with their teachers at the university level, and in particular, emotions such as nervousness, shame or frustration derived from their interaction with the university teachers.

Although the students admitted that their nervousness or anxiety was because they had been ill-prepared for English speaking and listening skills at the lower level of education, some of the students' comments seemed to suggest the practice of the university teachers was another source for such detrimental emotions. This is reflected in the accounts of Uyen, Nhu and Vy about their classes of English listening skill.

Uyen described her experience in learning the listening skill with a teacher at the university:

> In the beginning, I studied with Ms Toan (pseudonym). I was really overwhelmed as she put a lot of pressure on us in terms of the time to give the answers to the questions related to the listening practice. It was like . . . we had not been given opportunities to practise listening in high school while Ms Toan just insisted that we should be able to make sense of what we heard and give her the answers. . . . We felt really challenged and scared of this class.

Uyen had felt so "challenged" and "scared" of attending this listening course that she had fallen ill. At the end of her account, Uyen asserted: "My hair stood on end seeing the teacher in the

class. This is the most difficult period I've experienced."

Vy reported having suffered from a range of emotions in the class of English listening skill on the very first days at the university. She recalled that she had been "confused" because of having been "unable to make sense of anything from the recording". Her emotion shifted from confusion to anxiety as soon as she realised that she was lagging behind her peers. Vy explained: "as soon as I noticed that some of my classmates could answer the questions the teacher asked to check the understanding of the recording, I felt so stressed and anxious." What Vy believed to have had a strong impact on her emotion was dealing with the teachers' feedback and classroom management. She recounted:

> I also felt stressed in completing the listening assignments as it would be very uncomfortable listening to the teacher's comments when she called on you to check the answers and you were not able to answer. It would be very embarrassing to stand in front of the class because you could not give the correct answers to her questions.

In a similar vein, what had happened to Nhu in her English listening and writing classes had a serious emotional impact on her as she said "recalling the incidents always makes me want to cry". Nhu recalled her listening class as follows:

> The atmosphere in the listening classes was really tense. In the second class session, our class was split into two groups. It was in this class session that I was asked by the teacher to get out of the class just because I could not answer the teacher's question. I felt really bad on that day. She was so strict. In fact, she did rewind the recording for me to listen again, but I was completely unable to make sense of what I heard.

The story went on with Nhu's description of her writing class:

> In a writing class session when we were introducing ourselves. As soon as I finished my introduction, the teacher asked me a question. I could not understand her question, thus was unable to answer. It seemed she was linking sounds in her pronunciation. Now I realise that it was a really simple question about my personal information. I still remember the looks of my classmates at that time. They were really puzzled at me like, why couldn't I answer such a simple and easy question? At times when I think of the situation, I feel extremely ashamed.

Nhu's experiences in her listening and writing classes illustrate both contextual and emotional challenges emerging from the interaction between Nhu and her university teachers. In terms of

the contextual difficulty, it can be seen from Nhu's accounts that she found herself vulnerable in the university environment where she was expected by her teachers to be able to listen to and understand recordings of native English speakers' conversations or to make sense of what the teacher said in English.

Although teaching practice that puts pressure on the students is unlikely to represent common teaching practice, it was one of the possible risks that emerged from the student-teacher interactions. Indeed, the authority of the teachers in the classroom may have been the origin of the distant relationship between the university teachers and the students. Talking about the resources they took advantage of to overcome challenges, some participants reported that there seemed to be an invisible distance between them and the university teachers. For example, Dai seemed to be dissatisfied with the relationship between himself and the university teachers as he said: "The university teachers seem too busy to give us any encouragement or it could be because they think that there is no need for them do anything but teach." May tended "not [to] contact the teachers very much" because of "feel[ing] there is a distance between [them]". Ni said: "I feel uncomfortable meeting the teacher. I can't listen [to English], so whenever I meet her, I am frightened. I feel under pressure." It can be seen that the students found themselves unsupported, though they should have been entitled to encouragement and support from the teachers. It would seem that the teachers' authority had pervaded the classroom atmosphere and the teacher-student relationship, which can also be considered as a challenge to the English language learning of the students, and as a risk factor undermining resilience.

Furthermore, some first-year student participants reported having been exposed to disengaging teaching methods that either frustrated or demotivated them. The classroom activities were reported as being unvaried, traditional and monotonous. This assumption can be found in the responses of Ba, Hoang, My or Thi. Ba believed the teaching methods used by some teachers contributed to the challenges he had been facing in learning English. He described this as follows:

> In terms of the teaching methods, in my opinion, it would be better for the students to learn the language if the teachers could get the students involved in classroom activities that facilitate language learning. Most of the teachers at the university speak too much. Very few activities are organised to enhance language learning.

Hoang and Thi also shared similar views about the teaching methods of some university teachers. They respectively commented as follows:

> I felt that the teaching methods of the teachers did not inspire us, the students who want to learn. For example, I felt really bored with reading skill classes. The teacher kept looking at the book reading and lecturing without creating any further activities for us to participate in.

and

> I can sense that in addition to some good teachers at the university, there are some whose teaching methods are really monotonous. Their teaching takes place just like . . . after lecturing, they pose questions and the activity keeps going on like that till the end of the class. I don't feel it's interesting at all. Sometimes I don't really understand the questions but the teachers just expect that I should be able to answer the questions.

Thi added an example from her listening skill class to further justify the comments about the disengaging classroom activity: "The teacher plays the recording for us to listen to, then she calls on the students to answer the questions related to the recording. The class session ends as soon as we have finished with all the questions."

Dai tended to be a little more specific when expressing his dissatisfaction with the way he had been taught in English reading and listening skills:

> Some of the teachers are good. They've taught us with all their hearts. However, those I studied with in the last semester were really disappointing. Their lecture . . . in fact, I understand that we cannot expect too much from the lecturers, yet I could not bear the wrong pronunciation of some teachers. I had no problems with the teachers during the semesters prior to the most recent semester, which was extremely irritating to me. Also, they [the teachers] were like rushing through things, hardly giving the students time to think . . . just trying to finish the book without caring whether the students [understood].

Indeed, some participants tended to talk about their learning experience with a visiting native English teacher and compared that experience with what they had had with some on-campus-based teachers. Hoai, for example, recounted:

> Regarding the teaching methods, I've recently studied with a native English teacher, I felt his classes were very interesting, different from the ones I experienced with some [campus-based] teachers whose teaching was so boring, unvaried and traditional, failing to engage us. [For example] after lecturing, the teachers just call on the students to complete their in-class assignments.

Thi also compared her learning experience with the visiting native-English-speaker teacher to that of her previous English writing skill teacher:

> I have recently studied English writing skill with Mr Jeans (Pseudonym). It seemed his teaching methods were different from those of the Vietnamese teachers. His assignments seemed easier but I think I could improve my [writing] skill more. When I started learning writing, I got confused with complex and compound sentence structures taught by the [Vietnamese] teacher. As soon as the course ended, I forgot everything and the teacher in charge of the higher level of writing had to remind me of these structures again.

The above analysis has revealed the students' perceptions of difficulties and challenges derived from their interactions with the university teachers. In particular, the students found their English language learning at this level was compromised because of the teaching practice of some university teachers. The teachers' authority and teaching methods were reported as having influenced their learning in terms of putting pressure on the students, distancing students from the teachers and failing to engage or motivate them in the learning process. Inevitably, the interaction between the students and their teachers had resulted in negative emotions limiting their learning. Again, the analysis also reflects the interconnectedness between the contextual and internal factors within the risk factor subsystem.

5.1.3.3. The students and their peers

The following analysis draws firstly on the interview students' accounts of their backgrounds which was presented in section 5.1.1. as evidence for their perceptions of risk factors, emerging from the social conditions of their hometowns where they had grown up and experienced learning English before going to university. Although the full extracts of their responses will not be repeated, some words and phrases that reflect the interactions between the students and their peers will be quoted again to represent the emergence of difficulties and challenges generated through such interactions. The section then continues with the difficulties emerging from the students' interaction with their peers at the university. It ends with a typical case to illustrate the complexity and dynamic feature of the system of resilience.

Students concurred that their English learning had been influenced by the lack of engagement of their peers in learning English, thus resulting in an unfavourable learning environment. This can be illustrated through the cases of Ba, Dai, Hoai, Bich, Thi or Xuan, who included the institutional aspect related to their high school peers in their responses about their backgrounds.

Ba believed that his peers who mostly "did not take learning seriously" had not been able to create a competitive environment for him to put more effort into his English learning, thus preventing him from gaining better outcomes. Similarly, Hoai shared the same assumption about the engagement of her peers at her local high school. She asserted that "my peers in high school were mostly local ethnic minority people who did not take foreign language [English] learning seriously. Their [English] levels were very low." Such a comment seemed to imply her disappointment with the unstimulating environment where she had experienced learning English.

Similar comments about the lack of interest in learning English were also found in Dai, Bich, Thi and Xuan's accounts of their high school peers. While Dai and Thi respectively used phrases "no one" and "hardly anyone" to describe the limited number of people who had been interested in learning English at their school, Thi claimed that her "classmates at high school did not really want to learn English as they believed it was such a difficult a subject to learn". In a similar vein, Xuan believed that there had been "few capable peers in [her] class" for her to be able to "improve or practise English with."

The re-examination of the student participants' accounts of their backgrounds revealed their common belief that their learning had been influenced by an unstimulating environment mediated by the lack of interest or engagement of their high school peers. This is also reflected in their perceptions of challenges from interacting with their peers.

The examination of the interview data also indicated the students' perception of the risk from the lack of engagement of their peers at the university. Two students expressed their disappointment with the lack of engagement of their university peers. Thi believed that the lack of active participation in classroom activities on the part of her university peers had hindered her language learning. In her response about the type of language learner she saw herself as, Thi identified herself as a typical language learner by comparing herself with her classmates. Thi said:

> In terms of making an effort, I think I did make an effort in my learning. I feel as if I could imitate [the pronunciation] of native English speakers. . . . In fact, not many friends of mine are like me. . . . You think our [English major] students are quite passive, don't you? I feel like whenever I wanted to speak but the friend next to me refused to speak, I could not speak even though I tried to. It feels like a difficulty for me. For example, in a class of 35, there are only five students who are really engaged or

> interested in it. The rest tend not to take the initiative to participate in the activities. Once they are called on by the teacher, they are like . . . trembling and start to murmur things like: "Why me?"

The lack of self-efficacy of her university peers appeared most salient in the above excerpt of Thi's response. This lack of self-efficacy was likely to be associated with anxiety because of the teachers' practice. As a result, this seemed to have prevented her peers' active participation in classroom activities and subsequently influenced Thi's English learning process.

The inactive participation or lack of engagement of peers as a hindrance also seemed to be implied in My's comment below:

> I think the relationship between teaching and learning is a reciprocal one. That is when the teachers can engage the learners in their learning with interesting classroom activities, the students will respond positively which in return makes the teachers feel happy with their teaching and the learners themselves also find something worth learning from the class. In this case, I would not say it is totally because of the teacher, but many of my classmates are not very active in response to the teachers' questions.

Although My's comment seemed to reveal her dissatisfaction with her current learning experience, My tended to soften her justification by not blaming the teachers for her dissatisfaction but by referring to her classmates' inactive responses to the teacher's questions. This reflects her perception of a constraint from the interaction with her peers at the university.

The case of Nhu seemed interesting despite being a minor stand-alone case compared to the aforementioned. The analysis of Nhu's account indicated two situations that seemed to have had a significant impact on her English learning process. These both involved interaction with and the influence of peers.

> When I was in high school, my mother wanted me to help her at her stall in the market so that I could be more confident in communication (I was a reserved person). I was becoming more confident when a friend of mine at school told me: "You set your target to apply for enrolment as an English major at university, but why are you so bad at learning English?" Such a comment really shocked and frustrated me. I choked on my reply and went straight back home. I felt really frustrated.

Having her English criticised by her friend definitely hurt Nhu and this subsequently had an emotional influence on her language learning as Nhu admitted later in the interview that she continued to be obsessed by her friend's words.

The second situation happened to her in the early days at the university when she was unable to answer a question of her English writing skills teacher who expected Nhu to understand her question in English. As reported in the earlier section, this experience was related to Nhu's perception of challenges emerging from her interaction with the teacher. Again, the quote that illustrates this theme will not be repeated in full as it was also used in section 5.1.3.2. However, in that quote, Nhu reported that she was extremely embarrassed at the "looks" of her classmates who "were really puzzled" at her for not being able to "answer such a simple and easy question". Indeed, it is important to note that her emotions including embarrassment, sadness and irritation were derived not only from the teacher's teaching practice but also from the interaction between Nhu and her classmates. The strong impact of this interaction with her peers on her emotions was affirmed again at the end of the interview when she commented:

> What made me typical was because I could manage to ignore my friends' words and their looks which had really terrified me . . . They were like an offence to me for the effort I had made in the twelve years of studying.

In summary, the students reported having experienced an array of negative emotions in their interactions with their peers at either the high school or university level of education. While in most of the reported cases the interactions seemed clear as per the students' accounts, in others the interactions appeared less overt. For example, Nhu, whose interaction with her peers leading to detrimental emotions was actually less obvious because it was concealed by her description of the embarrassing situation that she was not able to answer her teacher's simple question. The interaction between Nhu and her peers is reflected in the fact that she felt embarrassed because of the puzzling looks of her peers (see section 5.1.3.2. for the excerpt). It is also worth noting that evidence for the students' perceptions of challenges emerging from interaction with their peers was mainly extracted from the quotes that were previously used as illustrations for the challenges and difficulties derived from other aspects of the institutional contexts. This indicates the complexity, dynamism and non-linearity of the complex system of foreign language learner resilience.

5.1.3.4. The students and the learning resources/facilities and programme

The examination of interview data indicated little information about difficulties and challenges

related to learning resources and facilities and disadvantages in terms of the training programme at the university. However, it would be unwise not to report these minor cases as they contribute to the development of the model of foreign language learner resilience.

Regarding the learning resources and facilities, the students tended to give general comments on the schools' facilities while focusing on the limited learning resources at high school and at the university as well. In terms of the facilities at schools, both Uyen and Ni seemed to imply that they had not facilitated English learning. While Uyen said that "there was a shortage of the facilities supporting English learning at the school here [her hometown]", Ni tended to compare the facilities between her hometown schools and those in urban areas as she said: "the facilities of the schools there [her hometown] were not as good as they were in the schools here [in the city]". Nhu backed up her view about the school's limited facilities for English learning with an example:

> There were not many constraints in terms of my school's facilities except the facilities for learning English listening skill. I remember when I was at Grade 11, the teacher sometimes brought to our class a cassette player for us to practise listening. Unfortunately, the cassette player broke down so often.

Two interview students reported having experienced a shortage of learning materials at their high schools and the university. Bich, in her description of her learning experience at high school, commented that "the learning materials were very limited. . . . In the school library, there were only mathematics and Vietnamese literature coursebooks and books related to natural sciences, but there were very few English books. In fact, there were hardly any English books." Referring to the learning resources at the university, Bich commented:

> It is just like what it was at my lower and upper secondary schools. The learning materials seem very old. If we need some new learning materials, it is probably easier and faster to buy them online than waiting for the university to update its library resource. The university teachers may suggest what books we should read or share with us the learning materials they compiled themselves for the subjects they are teaching. The university library seems to have very limited good materials for [English] learning.

Dai shared a similar description of the resources available at his high school. Discussing the quality of the library, Dai recollected: "It was quite difficult to borrow books from the library". He elaborated: "There were almost no English books. It was extremely difficult to look for materials to improve your level [of English]". Dai also reported having had limited access to

learning materials at the university and concurred with Bich about the shortage of learning materials at the university's library:

> It doesn't seem any better than it was at the high school in terms of the learning resources in the library. There are not many materials that suit my need in the university's library. I mean, a lot of learning materials available in the library are just suitable for those at lower levels than me while I tend to study a lot so I need a little more advanced materials.

Although information about the difficulties relating to the assessment policy was not prevalent in the interview data, there was a suggestion from one student that this could be a potential risk factor. Ha said:

> The assessment at the university is divided into two parts – 10% for ongoing assessment and 90% for summative assessment which represent a huge discrepancy and is inappropriate.

In conclusion, although the number of interview students reporting challenges in terms of learning resources, facilities and assessment policy at the university was small, their perspectives represent another possible factor that could hinder their English language learning processes.

5.1.4. Summary of first-year students' perception of risk factors

The above sections present first-year students' perception of the risk factors seen as the antecedent of the developmental process of resilience in foreign language learning. The analysis of interview data features students' shared perspectives on the factors that hindered their English learning process. These include contextual and individual factors emerging from the students' interactions with entities related to three contexts, namely community/society, familial and institutional contexts mediated also through their interactions. In particular, the findings indicated contextual disadvantages in terms of the geographical and socio-economic conditions of the students' places of origin. These sequentially led to their perception of limited or delayed learning opportunities, the lack of an environment for authentic English communication practice, and the lack of a supportive or engaging learning environment. The students also reported that their English learning had been challenged by familial issues such as family dysfunction, parental divorce, high expectations, and financial difficulties. Furthermore, the students believed their English learning had been limited by the teaching practice of teachers and the lack of engagement or motivation of their peers at different levels

of education, the institutional facilities or learning resources, and the university's assessment practices. Importantly, the analysis revealed internal factors detrimental to students' language learning, including the lack of engagement and/or motivation, negative emotions such as stress, anxiety or nervousness, and lack of self-efficacy. These internal factors were found to be closely linked with the contextual ones, creating an interwoven relationship between internal and contextual factors. Also, the findings revealed the complexity and non-linearity of the interaction between factors within the complex system of foreign language learner resilience as the exploration of the learning trajectories of different students indicated that one internal risk factor could derive from one or more contextual factors or vice versa.

5.2. First-year students' perception of protective factors

This section presents the first-year students' perceptions of protective factors enabling their resilience in foreign (English) language learning. In particular, it reports on the contextual and individual factors perceived as either being conducive to the students' English learning pathways or having mitigated the influence of the difficulties and challenges on their learning. The section draws mainly on the students' responses to interview questions about the resources they had capitalised on in the face of difficulties and challenges, yet other interview questions across the interview data are also looked at to represent the interconnectedness and interactions among factors.

The contextual protective factors are presented separately from the internal ones in the sections below. They include the external resources generated by the students' interactions with familial, institutional and society/community aspects of contexts and can be perceived as counterparts of risk factors emerging also from these aspects of contexts. To preserve the interactive feature of a complex dynamic system, I highlight the interactive mechanism whereby the protective factors had counteracted or mitigated the risk factors, leading to the students' process of resilience in English learning.

5.2.1. Protective factors from familial aspects of context

In terms of the protective factors derived from the students' interactions with familial aspects of context, the analysis revealed a large number of first-year students said that the support of their families had contributed to their effort to overcome difficulties and challenges in learning English. In particular, 14 out of 17 interview students reported that they had either been encouraged by their parents or taken good advantage of the support of a particular family member with whom they had a strong connection to sustain or improve in their English learning.

5.2.1.1. Parental support and encouragement

Eleven first-year students asserted that their parents' encouragement and support had given them the impetus to make progress in their English learning. For example, Xuan, in her response to the question about the role of her family in English learning, confirmed that her "parents always support [her] in learning English". This perspective was reaffirmed when she talked about the resources she had taken advantage of to bounce back fromchallenges and difficulties. Xuan stated: "My parents have always backed me up in difficult times. They often say things like 'You can do it. I know you can do it'". Likewise, Dai emphasised that "except for the support only from the family" he had "not sense[d] the support from any other sources since starting university". His statement contributed to the comment he made previously on the role of his family in his English learning pathway when he said:

> My family has a positive influence on my English learning. My parents are farmers. We are an average farming household, but my parents are always willing to sacrifice for me. They strive to create the most favourable condition for me to learn. They always encourage me as they believe that I am talented to learn English.

While the two students above tended to discuss the role of their parents' support and encouragement in general without mentioning particular situations where the support and encouragement had come into play, Ha, seemed more specific with a situation where her parents' supportive role came into effect. In addition to her general description that her parents were "public employees" and had "always create[d] the best condition" for her learning, Ha recounted:

> I was born in 1998, which means I am one year delayed in my study compared to my classmates. I dropped out after one year studying Economics at a university in a big city and decided to retake the university entrance examination to study this major [English language education] probably because I was away from home and I assumed I was not fit for Economics, but English. . . . Some of my friends and even my parents seemed to regret when they envisaged that I would have been a third-year student now if I had not quit my study after one year to start all over again. . . . I was experiencing a really difficult time as I felt sad and lonely when reviewing for the university entrance examination while all of my friends had gone away for their colleges, including my best friend who had gone abroad for higher education. Despite difficulties, I was determined to go on as I assumed that it would be a real waste of time if I did not embark on doing

> anything. Finally, as my parents realised that I was into learning English, they encouraged and supported me to retake the university entrance examination.

Ha's account above indicates the complexity of the interactions of various factors leading to the display of her resilient behaviours. While Ha's decision to drop out and retake the university entrance examination after one year of enrolment in Economics at university had put her into a difficult situation, her love for English and determination, seen as internal strengths, had counteracted the contextual challenges emerging from her decision and had pushed her to move forward. More importantly, it appears in her account that her parents' support and encouragement had given her considerable internal forces to surpass the challenges. In other words, Ha's internal factors had been boosted by her parents' support and encouragement seen as an external resource emerging from the familial context.

Indeed, Ha's perspective concurs with that of many other students whose accounts also reflect their perspectives on the role of parents' support and encouragement in response to difficulties and challenges in learning English. Ni, for instance, asserted that her "family was [her] motive" which had driven her to continue making an effort in learning English despite having experienced difficulties at university due to her lack of engagement in learning it at the secondary level of education as described in section 5.1. on the students' perceptions of risk factors. "My parents encouraged me a lot when I had the intention to give up because I found it [English] too difficult and I could not envisage my future after graduating", stated Ni about the resources she had taken advantage of to overcome challenges. Similarly, Nhu acknowledged her mother's support and encouragement which, she believed, had significantly uplifted her spirit at different stages in her learning trajectory. Much of the following excerpt was used as evidence for Nhu's perception of a risk factor derived from her interaction with a friend who questioned her ability in English, yet it can also illustrate her perception of her mother's supportive role in the presence of difficulties.

> Such a comment really shocked and frustrated me. I got stuck on my response and went straight back home. I felt really frustrated. I cried telling the story to my mother. She said to me that "you need to rise up and succeed in what is underestimated by others". In parallel with her encouragement, she successfully convinced my sister, who was working in a big city, to take a one-month leave and return home just to help me review and prepare for my university entrance examination.

The above excerpt indicates the interaction between the encouragement and support of Nhu's mother with both contextual and individual factors detrimental to her English learning. Such interaction between two types of factors can be viewed as one of the many interactive processes contributing to the development of Nhu's resilience in English learning.

Nhu's perception of her mother's support and encouragement in tackling crises learning at the university level. Describing her feelings in the course of overcoming difficulties and challenges, Nhu once again acknowledged the role of her mother:

> I was wondering why I was not as good as my classmates at the university despite starting to learn English in Grade 3. I was so wary that I had to talk to my mother about the difficulties I was facing. I told her how different English is taught here [at the university], including queries about why English has to be split into different skills, not as a whole to teach. . . . Again my mother encouraged me to continue with my learning. Her encouragement really uplifted me at times like this.

It is interesting to note that despite having experienced hardships emerging within families such as parental divorces or the loss of a family member, some students had managed to find support from their families. They seemed to either internalise and transform the difficulties into motivation for their learning or look for a positive aspect to move forward. This can be illustrated by the cases of Uyen and Vy. As for Uyen, although she asserted that growing up in a broken family had resulted in emotional hardship and subsequently had "an influence on [her] learning process, including English learning", she tended to internalise this and turn her familial issue into the drive to keep her moving forward. Uyen said:

> I feel like my family circumstance motivates me to make more effort in my learning. I can see how hard my dad, who is a builder, has been working to financially support me. I love him so much. I need to try my best in my learning as this is how I can acknowledge what he has done for me. The encouragement he gave me whenever we got together really motivates me.

It is worth noting in the above description that while Uyen reported having been emotionally influenced by her family circumstance, she had made use of that risk factor together with the connection with her father as a mediator to motivate her learning. In other words, Uyen's account indicates fluctuation of her internal factors (emotional hardship to motivation) mediated by the same situational and affective factors (her family circumstance and connection

with her father). This not only reveals interaction among factors but reflects the variation of the internal factors within the system in action.

Sharing a similar perspective, Vy asserted:

> In the face of difficulties or when I am feeling down, I think about my family. My father passed away when I was at Grade 6, but I am fortunate to have my mother with me. . . . My mother is nearly 70 years, but she's still doing farm work. As my father passed away when many of us [Vy and her siblings] were still in school, my mother took the financial burden to ensure the continuation of our education. I always think about my mother as she inspires me most.

In the above account, Vy acknowledged the role of her mother as a source of inspiration. Although the loss of her father must have been tragic for Vy, it seemed she had quickly recovered from the adverse situation by shifting her attention to her mother whose hard work to maintain her children's education inspired Vy to learn. Again, Vy's account reflects her perception of her mother's support as an external resource that counterbalanced the contextual difficulties and negative emotions that might have emerged throughout her English learning pathway.

However, it is noticeable that there seems to be a subtle difference between the case of Vy and that of Uyen. While Uyen tended to use her family issue (a contextual risk factor) as a catalyst to transform her emotional hardship into the motivation for her learning, Vy chose to look for the positive aspect in her familial context (Vy found she was fortunate to have her mother by her side) to neutralize the internal risk factors that might have emerged from the family's upheaval. This subtle difference regarding Uyen and Vy's perspectives on making use of family resources to overcome challenges indicates the nonlinear interaction of factors leading to the unpredictability of the complex system of foreign language learner resilience.

5.2.1.2. Support and encouragement from siblings

In addition to the support and encouragement from parents, five first-year students reported having been supported by their siblings. Ba said that his "third brother was the only family member whose encouragement and support inspired [him] to learn a lot". Ba's sense of the support from his brother was reflected in his description of how he had managed to learn English while being influenced by the family dysfunction:

> Whenever my mum and brothers get into arguments, I look for other learning spaces. I usually get online to search for materials and websites for my English learning. My [third] brother once suggested making a video clip in which I could use English to introduce my hometown scenery. I made that video clip and was about to upload it on Youtube to get feedback from people. I haven't uploaded it yet, but I did show it to my brother.

The fact that Ba had taken his brother's suggestion seriously indicates that Ba had counted on his brother's support to sustain his English learning despite difficulties.

Xuan and Bich shared similar descriptions of their sisters who had helped calm them down in events that made them feel unconfident or anxious. For instance, Xuan described a situation when her sister had helped gradually build up her self-efficacy:

> Our family often go on holiday together. Normally, I am quite shy approaching foreign visitors to start conversations. However, I might do it when I am urged by someone, especially my sister. She would ask me if I would like to talk with them. At first, I was quite hesitant, but she took me to them and helped me start the conversation. This has gradually built up my confidence.

Similarly, talking about the resources she had taken advantage of to sustain her English learning in response to difficulties and challenges, Bich at first asserted: "I don't think I could rely on anyone, but myself to overcome difficulties". However, she quickly added: "My family. . . my sister" to her statement afterwards. "My sister gave me advice that triggered my critical thinking. She calms me down and helps me overcome stress from occasional conflicts in my family", Bich elaborated.

In essence, the above analysis indicates first-year students' perception of the family as a source of support to sustain their English learning in the face of difficulties and challenges. The prevalence of this information in the interview data reflects the students' perspective on the significant role of family support and encouragement as an external resource counteracting the different challenges and difficulties emerging in their English learning pathways. The examination of data also uncovered the complexity and nonlinearity of the interactions among factors. This is reflected in the students' descriptions of family support and encouragement as counterparts of various contextual and/or individual risk factors. Interestingly, Uyen considered her broken family as a risk factor and a protective factor as well. On one hand, her family circumstance was seen as the cause of her emotional hardship, detrimental to her learning. On

the other, she seemed to internalise the hardship, make good use of her connection with and love for her father, and finally transform it into motivation to move forward. This minor case could serve as evidence for the variation of internal factors (her emotions) mediated by a single contextual factor (Uyen's family issue) within the system in action.

5.2.2. Protective factors from institutional aspects of context

Data analysis indicated first-year students' perceptions of protective factors derived from their interaction with their peers and teachers. In particular, 10 first-year students reported having taken advantage of the experience or expertise of more capable peers or collaborated with their peers to sustain or make progress in English learning while six out of 17 students believed that their teachers had played a role in the course of overcoming challenges and difficulties.

5.2.2.1. Relationship and collaboration with peers

Many of the students confirmed having either connected with more capable or competent peers to draw on their experience and expertise or having collaborated with a friend they met in the university environment to tackle issues emerging in the course of their learning. This is reflected in the accounts of Ha and Hoang. Ha, who previously talked about how she had been struggling with English speaking and listening skills at university as a consequence of the grammar-focused teaching practice at high school, described how she had been inspired by a classmate she admired:

> I talked to one of my classmates who had completed her first degree in Foreign Trade and was doing her second degree in English language education. I asked for her advice. She encouraged me and advised that I should practise listening and speaking as much as possible. She said that no one can become a good English user overnight. I looked up to her and said to myself: "She is much older than me but she's still studying. I am still young and I need to try harder".

In a similar vein, Hoang, who reported having suffered from uncertainty and frustration in English learning at times when she "found English difficult to acquire . . . and had the feeling of falling behind compared to [her] friends", also talked about a classmate whom she admired and wanted to be like:

> I realise that those with good English speaking skill had more job opportunities. They made use of English to find jobs. I want to be like them, especially like Dai. His English speaking skill and grammar are very good. Many teachers like his learning style. I really

> want to be like him. I've sought help from many of my friends, including him. I promise myself I will try harder.

Indeed, both Ha and Hoang seemed to have invested emotionally in their English learning as reflected in their admiration for their competent or more capable peers. In particular, Ha seemed to have been resourceful as she had been able to gain momentum for her learning and draw on the experience of her classmate whose effort and determination in studying for a second university degree impressed her. Similarly, Hoang tended to invest emotionally in learning English as she took the initiative in seeking help from a classmate she admired and wanted to be like.

The above analysis has highlighted the complexity of the interactive mechanism generating the process of resilience in learning English and has reflected the interaction between external and internal protective factors. These factors, in turn, seemed to act as counterparts to the factors aforementioned as having limited Ha and Hoang's English learning process. More specifically, they both took the initiative to capitalise on their more capable and competent peers and invested emotionally in their learning to overcome difficulties in English speaking and listening skills derived from earlier grammar-focused teaching (as in Ha's case) or frustration or uncertainty in learning English (as in Hoang's case).

The first-year students had a shared perspective on the benefit of peer collaboration in response to difficulties and challenges in learning English. This perspective was found in the responses of Bich, Ngoc, Nhu and Vy. For example, Bich appeared to be resourceful in "asking for help" and "practising English" with her roommate who "was studying medicine but had a good command of English". Similarly, Ngoc chose to take the initiative in "using English even when joking with friends" and to "pair up with [her] roommate to practise speaking English to prepare for speaking tests".

Nhu and Vy tended to be more specific in describing how they had collaborated with their friends. According to Nhu, she had been inspired by her roommate who "was studying accounting but was also interested in learning English". Recalling the time when she was struggling to catch up with her English skills classes at the university, Nhu said:

> My first week was quite bad. I spent the whole weekend trying to find the solution to my problem, but it seemed too hard for me to sort it out in a short time. I started to learn English words associated with various topics, but again I could not remember the words for long. I then started to learn words in sentences. This helped me remember the words

> longer but I could not differentiate sounds in the sound sequences when I listened to the sentences read on the application [on her phone] without looking at the sentences. My roommate said to me, "Why don't you start over again? You might be a little lagging behind others, but it should be all right." Then I started to learn and practise the IPA [International Phonetic Alphabet] with the roommate. After one month, I was able to use 44 sounds to spell.

Although the above excerpt, for the most part, is better used as an illustration for the support and encouragement Nhu received from her roommate, the detail about their collaboration reflects in that Nhu and her roommate "started to learn and practise the IPA" together. Indeed, this was just the beginning of their collaboration as Nhu went on to say:

> At present, I get motivated by taking part in a competition with my roommate. We are competing with each other on DUOLINGO, a mobile application. Sometimes when I tend to quit the game, she says to me provocatively "you are a loser", which triggers my determination to learn again.

In a similar vein, Vy also talked at length about one of her classmates with whom she especially felt connected. Discussing the resources she had taken advantage of in response to difficulties in learning English, Vy described:

> In addition to my family, my motivation also comes from one of my classmates. We became close friends as we worked in the same group in the class activities. We have been supportive of each other. We often meet up after class to do peer correction for our English homework or practise speaking English. Even though my English level is as limited as hers and we don't feel we are developing a lot, we still find ourselves helpful to one another in identifying each other's mistakes and fixing them. At times when I feel frustrated because of the difficulties and pressure, she uplifts my spirit. She appears to be optimistic despite the unfavourable family circumstances. I have learned a lot from her. I find myself improving . . . not only in English but in other aspects of life.

In general, the above analysis indicates first-year students' perspective on the protective factor derived from interactions with their peers. While the support, encouragement, and collaboration with their peers could be seen as contextual factors beneficial for the students' learning, they also seemed to trigger the internal factors favourable for the process of resilience in learning English as it showed in the cases of Nhu and Vy. These students' perception of the protective

factors from their interactions with peers reflect the complexity of the interactions of factors within the complex dynamic system of resilience.

5.2.2.2. Support and encouragement from school teachers

Six first-year students' shared their perception of support and encouragement from their teachers, especially those from their high schools. The responses of the three students below best capture the perspective.

For example, in discussing the resources he had taken advantage of to sustain his language learning in the face of difficulties, Dai mentioned one of his high school English teachers:

> Regarding the human resource that I could take advantage of, I can remember one of my high school English teachers who was really supportive. She knew exactly where I was at and was willing to do her best to support me. She was able to provide me with learning materials.

Likewise, Trang, another student in the cohort, who suffered from anxiety due to her family's crisis, also reported having been supported by her high school teacher, who she described as having taken measures to help her gain confidence in speaking English. Trang recalled:

> I could only feel confident to speak English when standing in front of her. Once she asked me to speak in front of my classmates, I tended to look at her to speak but she told me to turn to my friends, close my eyes and try to think about things I wanted to say. I did what she told me and imagined that I was just talking to her. I finally made it. She also told me that I could come to her house to practise English. I felt comfortable speaking English with her.

Sharing a similar perspective, Nhu confirmed that she had been receiving support from both her lower secondary and high school teachers in addition to the support and encouragement from her mother. Nhu recalled the time when she was preparing for the university entrance examination with the assistance of her sister:

> My sister helped me review for the exam. However, it was so hasty that I felt really frustrated because of being stuffed with grammar. I even lost my motivation and started to forget my mother's encouragement [after having been underestimated by a friend]. Then I gave my lower secondary English teacher a call. She was so enthusiastic that she came to my house to explain to me every English grammatical structure that I could not

> understand. She gave interesting examples that were easy for me to understand and she even used games in her teaching. In this way, she helped me understand English grammatical structures bit by bit.

In another situation, Nhu also mentioned her lower secondary and high school English teachers she had been able to ask for consultation about her difficulties. She said:

> I phoned my lower secondary and high school English teachers who I thought could help me improve my English to ask them about their experience in learning English; whether they had encountered the same difficulties as I was having and how I could overcome them.

Nhu's descriptions above of how she had drawn on the experience and expertise of her English teachers revealed her sense of being supported by her teachers. This protective factor counteracted the risk factors emerging throughout her English learning trajectory.

To sum up, data analysis revealed first-year students' perceptions of protective factors derived from their interaction with institutional aspects of context. In particular, the students believed that they had received support and encouragement from their peers and teachers to counter difficulties and challenges in the course of learning English. These factors add to the inventory of protective factors that could contribute to the shaping of foreign language learner resilience.

5.2.3. Protective factors from the society/community contexts

Examination of the data detected little information about the students' perceptions of protective factors derived from their interactions with the society/community contexts. Two first-year students reported having taken initiative in seeking support outside their families and institutional contexts, in the community where they were living.

To overcome challenges and difficulties and sustain his English learning, Ba reported that he had taken "part in the English speaking club of an English language centre in the city" in addition to other learning activities he had become involved in. Similarly, Thi seemed resourceful in dealing with her deficiency English speaking skill as she reported having managed to "look for further learning opportunities". She recalled:

> I met a lady who used to study in England. She told me that she would not teach but would practise English skills with me. She got me to listen to a podcast about effortless English then I practised following her instructions bit by bit.

Ba and Thi's accounts seem to indicate sources of support from their interactions in society/community contexts. Simultaneously, their descriptions are likely to reflect the students' agentic actions in response to challenges and difficulties, which will be discussed further in the sections presenting the internal factors beneficial to the developmental process of resilience in English language learning.

5.2.4. Information and communications technology as another external resource

Students also found comfort in learning English by interacting with a wide range of resources available on the internet in the midst of challenges and difficulties. Fourteen out of 17 students confirmed having searched for English learning materials, courses and videos available online or made connections with people on social media to sustain and improve their English knowledge and skills. These shared perspectives on *information and communications technology* (ICT) as an affordance for English learning despite difficulties and challenges were reflected in the students' responses to the interview questions about how they had managed to overcome difficulties.

Describing how she had managed to overcome the limited learning opportunity due to the socio-economic conditions of her hometown and where she was enrolled in the university, My said:

> When I studied at the Foreign Trade University, I could easily find a language centre to enrol in. However, I felt it was so limited when I returned here. . . . There were few language centres here, I could only study on my own. I studied on the BBC channel every day or read materials about English language teaching techniques on websites such as the British Council or English Teaching Forum. Regardless of the teaching techniques, I might be able to learn, I could at least practise my English reading skill.

Ba also shared a similar perspective as reflected in the excerpt used in the previous section as evidence for his perception of the support and encouragement from his brother. According to Ba, he found comfort in using the available resources on the internet for his learning in the event of conflicts in his family when he mentioned "get[ting] online to search for materials and websites for English learning" as "other learning spaces" to stay away from "arguments" between his mom and brothers. In another description, Ba continued to highlight the role of ICT as a resource he had taken advantage of to overcome the lack of an authentic environment for English communication. This time Ba's description focused particularly on social media which he had drawn on to improve his language skills:

> As there were very few foreigners coming to this city to visit or to teach English, we did not have a favourable environment to practise the language. My friends told me that we could sign up to practise speaking English with foreigners on the internet and they would help correct our mistakes in pronunciation and grammar. Hence, in addition to searching for learning materials on the internet, I made friends with foreigners on Facebook to practise speaking English with them.

In the same vein, Dai talked with confidence about how he had made use of ICT to improve his English skills, which could be seen as his response to the grammar-focused and traditional teaching practice he mentioned previously when discussing the difficulties regarding his English learning at high school.

> Since I was a high school student, I have found the solution to my English learning problems . . . for example, for reading, writing and listening skills, I searched for uploaded copies of the learning materials of these skills on the internet, printed them out for practice. For listening skills, I spent time listening to various videos available online. It has been like my daily routine. I listen to something when going to bed; or even when I am having my meals, I watch something in English. I watch a lot of English-speaking videos about technology from different sources such as linuxtechtip.com, TedTalk or TedEd.

Some students reported that they had not merely downloaded learning materials, watched videos available online, or connected with English-speaking people via social media to immerse themselves in an English speaking environment, but had taken one step further in making use of this resource as well.

For example, in addition to "watching videos on Youtube" to improve her English listening skill, Ha confirmed having "searched for applications and played games on mobile to learn more vocabulary". Ha considered such learning activities as a way to "put [her] mind at ease and away from worries" about her low level of English due to the grammar-focused teaching method and confirm her commitment to her choice of learning English as a major. Likewise, Ni, another student in this cohort, seemed to be more resourceful as she had "use[d] tools on the internet to practise speaking" in addition to "play[ing] games to improve English vocabulary". Ni stated: "I put my recorded speech into Google Translate".

Similar ways of exploiting the ICT resources to facilitate English learning can also be found in the responses of Nhu and Uyen, who both had made the most of them with their smartphones.

While Nhu confirmed having "used Google applications in parallel with enrolling in a paid online course to sustain English knowledge and skills", Uyen reported having switched from her previous learning style to a new one where her smartphone had been brought into effect. Discussing her response to difficulties and challenges in learning English, Uyen said:

> I've tried out every learning method. In the past, I learned English in an old-fashioned way. That is, I noted down new vocabulary on paper or re-read texts at home. I just practised reading the texts but was not sure if I got the right pronunciation as there were no recordings of the texts available for me to listen to and read along. In addition, I did a lot of grammar exercises. As soon as I started university, I had a smartphone. Since then, I've been using the smartphone to download from the internet not only IELTS listening materials but also applications and games to learn English through pictures or flashcards.

The presentation of the above cases illustrates first-year students' perspective on ICT as an affordance for English language learning in the face of difficulties and challenges. The students' descriptions of how they had exploited the ICT tools to counterbalance the difficulties reflect how ICT as an external protective factor had contributed to mitigating the risks confronting the students' learning. Such interactions are likely to contribute to the representation of the process of foreign language learner resilience in the context of English education at the university level in Vietnam.

5.2.5. Internal resources as internal protective factors

This section highlights the first-year students' internal resources seen as internal protective factors and underscores the interaction between them and their counterparts, contributing to the shaping of foreign language learner resilience. It draws on the students' descriptions of their thinking, feelings, desires/motives and behaviours in response to language learning difficulties. The students' internal resources included *purposefulness*, *initiative*, *resourcefulness*, *self-awareness*, *perseverance* and *optimism* of which purposefulness, initiative, resourcefulness, and self-awareness were found more prevalent than perseverance and optimism, but all these internal protective factors are taken into account and described below.

5.2.5.1. Purposefulness

Seventeen first-year student participants reported having been motivated by a sense of purpose to sustain their English learning or make progress in learning it. In other words, first-year

student participants tended to display *purposefulness* as one of their internal resources. Discussing motives to sustain their English learning despite difficulties and challenges, a majority of students reported having been inspired by the expectation to find a job after graduating while some mentioned studying abroad as their goal.

Regarding future employment opportunities, Ngoc commented that she "chose to study English in order to find a stable job". This is mirrored in May's response:

> I think the possibility to find a good job after graduating has always been the biggest motive driving me to sustain my English learning. . . . Even though I am studying English language education, I don't think I will become a teacher of English. I want to be a business person. I will probably study Marketing or Management after finishing this course.

While these two students seemed to be motivated in learning English because of future job opportunities regardless of the kind of job, other students tended to have been driven by their particular career preferences as well as the expectation to contribute to mitigating the financial hardship of their families. For example, Ha and Hoang seemed to have been inspired to study English as a major with relatively clear career pathways as they respectively said:

> I don't think I will become a teacher of English after graduating, but I will do something related to English, for example, I could be an international tourist guide.

and

> If I could not find a teaching position at some school, I might probably shift to seeking jobs such as a tourist guide or an interpreter.

A similar perspective can also be detected in the responses of Uyen and My. Uyen shared her thoughts on her desired profession as follows: "I want to be a tourist guide and a good interpreter. It sounds quite ambitious, but it is something that guides me and keeps me making more effort". Responding to the question as to whether she identified herself as a typical English learner and what made her so, Uyen explained that it was related to her determination:

> I think I am a typical English learner. I need to try harder because of my family's circumstance. I know what I want. Absolutely, I want to be proficient in English so that I can become a tourist guide and a good interpreter in the future.

Similarly, My found herself inspired by the English teaching profession after a few years working in the foreign trade industry:

> I found a job . . . in a freight forwarding company after graduation [from Foreign Trade University] and worked there for one year. As I had to use English in my work, I realised the significance of English. As far as I can remember, I used to contact the company's agents from Turkey, China via Skype . . . [and] search for information about the seaports around the world on the internet. I found out that English was like a bridge that could link people from different countries. It was like I could reach out to the world, so immense, not just confined to my working corner.
>
> . . . I gradually realised that my personality was not suitable for working in the business environment. I decided to teach English to a group of kids in my neighbourhood, which also opened a whole new world for me because it allowed me to have access to . . . websites and a TESOL course I attended. I was able to realise the significance of teaching because when we teach, not only do we convey knowledge and skills to others but also many other things including inspiring and making learning a memorable time. Teaching is a meaningful job for me.

The above excerpt indicates that My's motivation to learn English had been enhanced by a sense of purpose. It also reflects the development of My's motivation that contributed to the process of overcoming obstacles in her learning pathway toward her preferred profession. First, her motivation started to take shape when she realised how beneficial English could be to help her discover the world. It became stronger when she took a further step to explore the field of English teaching and eventually be inspired by "the significance of teaching". In other words, My's love for English had nurtured her motivation leading to the discovery of her career preference. Thus, My became more motivated and purposeful which helped her overcome difficulties or challenges in her learning pathway. In fact, without a sense of purpose in terms of her career preference, My may not have been so motivated and inspired that she had decided to take the risk of quitting her current job and "retak[ing] the university entrance examination" after having been out of school and university for years. In brief, the above discussion about My's case indicates the complexity of the interaction among factors within the system of resilience, including the interplay between the internal protective factors – motivation and purposefulness and between these two protective factors and her anxiety from her decision to quit her current job retake the university entrance examination.

Although some students revealed their expectation to find a job after graduating, their purposefulness seemed to have been driven by the expectation to support or mitigate their families' financial hardships. In other words, their sense of purpose was likely to be derived from a sense of responsibility. This can be illustrated in the responses of Nha, Ni and Trang. For example, Nha said without hesitation:

> I just think that if I am good at what I am studying, it will be easier to find a job so that I could share the financial burden with my mother. It is my stable and long-term dream.

This response indicates Nha's purposefulness, driven by her awareness of her mother's hardships and the sense of responsibility for her. Such a sense of purpose and responsibility generated Nha's motivation to sustain her English learning despite difficulties and challenges derived from her family's circumstances. In other words, Nha's purposefulness could serve as a counterpart to both contextual and internal risk factors from her interaction with familial aspects of context.

Similar interactive mechanisms amongst the factors can also be evidenced in the responses of Ni and Trang, who respectively stated:

> The motive that pushes me to try my best and excel in learning is the expectation of finding a job easily in the future. I want to do good things for my family, especially for my parents. I want to change my family's living conditions.

and

> I hope that I will be able to find a job so that I could support my mom in taking care of my younger siblings. It is my motivation for learning English.

The above two excerpts appear to support the students' motivation to maintain or make efforts in their English learning with the expectation of employment, which was fueled by their sense of responsibility toward their families. As a consequence, this interrelationship fed into shaping their purposefulness, contributing to shaping their resilience in English learning.

In addition to future employability, studying abroad was also seen as a goal and a motivating factor for them to make an effort in learning despite difficulties and challenges. This is reflected in the responses of four students, Bich, Ha, Nha and Nhu, who appeared to show their commitment to the intention to study abroad. Bich stated that her "only motive is studying abroad". Similarly, Ha also appeared to be inspired by the idea of studying abroad in addition

to her expectation to be employed as a tourist guide after graduating. In her response about whether she would identify herself as a typical English language learner, Ha stated:

> I don't think I am a typical learner as I believe that anyone who is inspired or supported by their families would also be motivated to change. What is more important is whether the learner really wants to change themselves or not; whether they want to make an effort and whether they have a sense of purpose or not; I don't think I will become a teacher of English after graduating, but I will do something related to English. For example, I could be an international tourist guide. I also want to study abroad.

Although Ha did not identify herself as a typical learner, her response to the question made her stand out as she showed a strong sense of purpose nurtured by her expectation of employability and a desire to study abroad.

Likewise, Nhu and Nha also expressed their wish to study abroad. However, their shared perspective seemed different from others' in that the intent to study abroad seemed to feed into their sense of responsibility toward their families, which may have contributed to shaping their purposefulness. This is evidenced in Nhu's statement as follows:

> I want to go to Japan. It is important to have a good command of [the English] language in order to communicate when you are abroad. Also, it partly comes from my family. I mean, my family's economic situation is not good. I need to take my sister as a model.

Nhu seemed to assume that studying hard with the intent to study abroad would ensure a future whereby she could help improve the family's economic situation just as her sister had done. A similar assumption can also be detected in Nha's response. Adding to her previous statement about her expectation of employment after graduating, Nha confirmed that her "short-term goal is to finish [her present course] as soon as possible to apply for a scholarship to study abroad". This statement seemed to reinforce her sense of purpose and contribute to her motivation to sustain her learning, which was likely to support her sense of responsibility toward mitigating her mother's financial burden.

5.2.5.2. Initiative and resourcefulness

Initiative and *resourcefulness* are the other two dominant internal resources detected in the interview data. Students with initiative tended to proactively take action in finding solutions to impediments and showed themselves to be autonomous in their learning while those with resourcefulness took advantage of the available resources to navigate and maintain their

learning in the face of difficulties. While the former was displayed by 15 out of 17 first-year students, the latter was shown by 13 students. It is important to note that although initiative and resourcefulness seem to be two separate internal resources, some students' descriptions of their behaviours can be ascribed to both. The presentation of the findings below first looks at the students' behaviours typically representing initiative. It then explores the descriptions that best show the students' resourcefulness and finally examines those that display both of these internal resources.

The students whose reports indicated initiative tended to be proactive and autonomous in their learning. For example, Trang, described how she had taken the initiative to overcome her nervousness in communication as follows:

> I have tried communicating with some foreign teachers who are teaching at an international primary school near my home. In addition, I am also working part-time in a restaurant and a coffee shop. . . . I am trying my best to practise communicating with people in either Vietnamese or English so as to gain confidence. I first started with speaking in front of people in Vietnamese because I couldn't even speak especially when I was asked by the teacher to speak in front of my classmates.

The description above indicates Trang's initiative in coping with her anxiety which had prevented her from communicating effectively in public and hindered her language learning. In particular, she had managed to move out of her comfort zone by "communicating with some foreign teachers" and "working part-time in a restaurant and a coffee shop" to gain confidence. This also reflects the interactive process between the two factors within Trang, including her initiative and anxiety, which contributes to the development of her resilience in English learning.

Similarly, the responses of Nha and Nhu also indicate their initiative in dealing with problems hindering their English learning. For example, Nha seemed to have shown her initiative guided by a sense of purpose. She reported having actively taken measures to adjust her learning in response to her poor performance. She elaborated:

> About my first year at the university, as I told you previously, I did not have the intention to enrol in English language education; I did not put effort into learning. . . . Consequently, I did not get a good result at the end of the first semester, which also made me rethink: Why did I perform so badly while in fact, I could have done much better? So during the summer holiday, I started to set up goals for my learning. I thought

> to myself that I need to graduate with the best results. I started to look for learning materials, set up a schedule. My biggest problems were English speaking and listening. I first started practising the listening skill. I sometimes felt frustrated with the practice . . . but learning a foreign language is like "small rain lays great dust". I practised daily little by little, which then helped me overcome the feeling of frustration.

Nhu also shared a similar description of how she had managed to develop an action plan for overcoming the difficulties in her learning in response to a classroom situation that had embarrassed her. Part of the excerpt below was used as evidence for the protective factors from the students' interaction with institutional aspects of context. However, it can also illustrate Nhu's initiative in overcoming difficulties in her learning pathway.

> My first week was quite bad. I spent the whole weekend trying to find the solution to my problem, but it seemed too hard for me to sort it out in a short time. I started to learn English words of various topics, but again I could not remember the words for long. I then started to learn words in sentences. This helped me to remember the words for longer but I could not differentiate sounds in the sound sequences when I listened to the sentences [read on the application] without looking at the sentences. . . . I developed a detailed plan for my learning, yet I also needed to make changes to it. I tried the plan out for the first week and then made changes bit by bit because it was not easy to change my daily routine all at once. I developed my schedule in detail not only about my learning activities but also my daily routines such as when I should get up or even what I should have for my breakfast.

In a nutshell, Nha's and Nhu's descriptions reveal their initiative in setting up learning goals or developing detailed plans for their learning as a response to the impediments emerging in their learning pathways. Their proactive approach to finding solutions to their difficulties seemed to have been guided by their sense of purpose, as in Nha's statement "I thought to myself that I need to graduate with the best results" or in Nhu's assertion "I felt I need to be good at English so that my classmates will not look at me like that" when she talked about the embarrassing classroom incident.

Thirteen out of 17 first-year students displayed resourcefulness. This is reflected mostly in the students' descriptions of how they had taken advantage of ICT to manage their learning difficulties. Dai, for example, displayed resourcefulness when he talked about how he had made the most of resources from the internet to practise his English skills (see section 5.2.4 for the

excerpt of Dai's response about his perception of ICT as a resource). Dai's resourcefulness also reflects more clearly when he added:

> I always have to practise speaking on my own. I sometimes have to play two or three roles in a conversation when I practise speaking. As I said earlier that there was no one interested in practising speaking English with me so I have to practise by myself, playing different roles in a conversation.

Dai showed himself to be a resourceful person as he had been able to navigate his learning in situations where he had had few opportunities to practise his English communication skills. By taking advantage of ICT, he had been able to successfully maintain his English learning in the presence of difficulties. Dai's description above also reveals the interaction between the two counterparts – risk factors and protective factors of the system of resilience.

To a certain extent, the students' behaviours described above could be attributable to both initiative and resourcefulness. As for the case of Dai, while his description above illustrated his resourcefulness, it could serve as evidence for his initiative in that he had been proactive in finding solutions to impediments to English language practice. Such an interpretation also seems logical in Bich's account of how she had managed to improve her English skills which were assumed to be deficient due to the earlier grammar-focused teaching:

> In practising the listening skill at home, if I can't keep up with the recording I look up in the transcript to find out the words or phrases that I miss or look for the pronunciations of the words in the dictionary. For the speaking skill, I am too shy to be proactive in answering the teacher's questions, but I tend to practise speaking English with my classmates as much as possible. I also practise speaking in front of the mirror, suggested by some teachers or shadowing the pronunciations and intonation of native speakers in the recordings.

Bich's account showed her initiative in finding solutions to her learning problems. She appeared to be autonomous in her learning as she took the initiative in practising her skills at home when she was aware of her deficiency studying at the university level. She showed herself to be proactive in finding resources. Bich's description of her proactive behaviours also indicates her resourcefulness. Specifically, Bich appeared to be able to overcome impediments, which is reflected in her use of resources such as the dictionary and audio transcripts to deal with difficulties. In addition, Bich showed resourcefulness in that she seemed able to navigate her

learning in difficult learning situations, evident in her drawing on the teachers' suggestion and imitating native speakers in audio recordings.

Hoang's account of her response to difficulties in her English learning suggests a similar inference. Hoang was inspired by a more capable peer in her class. Having been inspired, Hoang showed herself to be determined, proactive and resourceful in her learning as seen in an excerpt in which Hoang expressed her desire to use Dai as a model (see section 5.2.2.1 for Hoang's perception of support from peer collaboration).

Her initiative and resourcefulness seemed to be reflected more clearly as she added to her statement above with the following comment:

> At home, I listen to English pop songs. I also registered for an online course to improve my English skills. . . . I realised that what I could learn in class was not enough; I bought an online course. In fact, the time scheduled for each module of English skill is very limited, only four class sessions for each module, while we have to absorb a large amount of knowledge and skills. Many of the lecturers were only able to share guidance on how to learn the module effectively. Thus, I don't think the class time is sufficient for me.

In the above comment, Hoang seemed to be well aware of the hurdle that might limit her learning – the limited class time prescribed for modules of English language skills. Hence, in addition to seeking help from her peers and practising at home by listening to English pop songs, Hoang took the initiative to register for an online course to improve her English skills. This reflects her resourcefulness as she was able to take advantage of online resources to navigate her learning through an obstacle in her language learning pathway.

Hoang's case can also illustrate the complexity of the interactions of factors shaping the complex system of resilience in foreign language learning. To elaborate, while Hoang's feeling of anxiety could represent the interaction between the internal and contextual risk factors, her actions in response to these risk factors also represent the interaction between the protective factors and the above-mentioned risk factors. In addition to the interaction between the counteractive factors, Hoang's behaviours also reflect the interaction between the internal and contextual protective factors in that her resourcefulness and initiative were displayed through interacting with her peers and the ICT environment.

5.2.5.3. Self-awareness

Also prevalent in the interview data was students' display of *self-awareness.* In particular, 11 out of 17 students were identified as self-aware in that they tended to acknowledge contextual and personal weaknesses or strengths.

In Hoang's account of her response to difficulties, she acknowledged: "I realised that what I could learn in class was not enough; I bought an online course." This statement indicates Hoang's self-awareness of both contextual drawbacks and personal weaknesses, including the limited class time and her deficient language skills. It was her self-awareness that had driven her to buy an online course so that she would have more time to practise and improve. This also indicates the interaction between an internal protective factor and a contextual risk factor – her self-awareness and the limited class time she perceived as a risk factor to her learning.

In a similar vein, Ha described how she had managed to overcome challenges in her English learning pathway:

> I often reflected on listening skill class sessions in which I was not able to make sense of the recordings I listened to. I thought to myself: "OK. I was bad today. I should not be that bad anymore". Then I kept thinking about the reason why I had chosen to enrol in this course at this university; why I had had to waste one year to be able to enrol; I had to do something, not to give up on what I had chosen.

In another situation when Ha was describing how her parents' encouragement had contributed to the continuity of her effort put in learning English despite difficulties, she recalled:

> My mother often showed her concern about my learning by saying things like "you ought to focus on your learning as you are now a university student. That is all we can do for you. If you want to succeed in life, you should study hard, otherwise . . .". This made me wonder, as a student, I also experienced learning with teachers with whom I was not really interested in working. What would it be like if I ever became a teacher like them? I need to change from now; otherwise, I would possibly be thought of as an ineffective teacher by my students in the future.

The excerpts above indicate that Ha was well aware of her challenges. In the earlier excerpt, her self-awareness is apparent in the fact that she had reflected on her own performance in class, which had also given her an idea about what level she was at and what she needed to do to improve the situation. Likewise, in the second excerpt, Ha had drawn upon her mother's

encouragement to reflect on her learning experiences which again had given her a chance to reflect on her future whereby she was likely to realise the weaknesses that needed improving. A complex interactive mechanism involving layers of interacting factors was shown to contribute to the development of Ha's resilience in learning English. Although the interrelationship between factors and the interactions appear to be so complex in this mechanism, it is possible to look at the first layer of interaction which involves the two major groups of factors - protective factors and risk factors. In this light, Ha's self-awareness had come into play as an internal protective factor, counteracting the risk factors derived from her decision to re-take the university entrance examination after one year studying economics. By reflecting on her unproductive performance in class and the prospect of becoming an ineffective teacher, Ha had also prompted her motivation to move forward in her learning.

While some students demonstrating self-awareness acknowledged their contextual and/or personal weaknesses, others recognised their strengths or displayed "the capacity to size [themselves] up" (Levine, 2003, p. 275). Bich said with confidence that although she acknowledged that her "listening skill at the beginning of the course was at a very low level", she believed her "good pronunciation and a relatively rich repertoire of English vocabulary" would help her improve her listening skills. Therefore, "I just tried my best in practising" Bich added. It appears evident in Bich's response that while she was able to recognise both her weaknesses and strengths, her awareness of her strengths seemed to give her the impetus to make progress in her learning.

As for Dai, he tended to make his own assessment of his situation when he talked about the sources of support he had taken advantage of. Although Dai acknowledged the support he had received from one of his English teachers at high school, he asserted: "the teacher was able to give me advice or guidance, but nothing more because learning is my own responsibility. Making improvements is my own responsibility". Dai's statement not only reflects his determination in taking control of his learning but also show his ability to evaluate his situation as he realised that he would not be able to rely on the teacher's support for long. In other words, he seemed to display self-awareness which had helped him take charge of his learning.

The analyses of these typical cases have unveiled the complexity of the interactions between this internal protective factor and other factors, including its contextual and internal counterparts.

5.2.5.4. Perseverance and optimism

Perseverance and *optimism* are two positive individual characteristics which emerged as less dominant themes in the data. Eight first-year student participants appeared to display perseverance while three participants showed optimism. Those who were ascribed as having perseverance tended to consistently focus on achieving their set goals despite difficulties and challenges while optimistic students were characterised by their positive thinking in the face of difficulties.

My, who decided to "retake the university entrance examination" to study toward the Bachelor degree in English education after five years working in the foreign trade industry, recalled how she had struggled with lots of uncertainty and negative feelings in making the decision.

> Looking back to the year 2016, it seems to me that it was one of the bravest decisions I have ever made. While I was reviewing to prepare for the entrance examination to this university, it seemed to me that I had made the craziest decision. I was so anxious and worried and keep wondering, 'Why do I have to study for another BA degree?'. If I enrolled in an in-service part-time course, it would just take me only one and a half or two years to finish and I could skip studying subjects that I had already learned in my previous BA degree programme. But here in this area, I did not have access to such a learning opportunity. I had to revise high school subjects such as mathematics and Vietnamese literature within 2 months to prepare for the entrance examination. I was really under pressure and stressed. Later, I felt satisfied with the result which was the highest in the examination.

Despite her struggle with these negative feelings which disturbed her learning, My persevered through making her "craziest" but "bravest" decision. Her perseverance eventually helped her overcome the stress to successfully make her first move toward achieving her English teaching career goal. This was reflected in the fact that she had got the highest result in the entrance examination for the English teacher training programme at the university.

Describing the difficulties in learning English at the university level after "dropp[ing] out after one year studying Economics" to study English Language Education, Ha said with determination: "It was because I love learning English that despite a lot of difficulties, I will manage to overcome and will never be discouraged and give up". Ha's statement indicates her perseverance, contributing to shaping her resilience. In another description of her difficulties arising from her decision to quit her Economics programme, Ha once again showed her

perseverance:

> Some of my friends and even my parents seemed regretful when they envisaged that I would have been a third-year student now if I had not quit my study after one year to start all over again. . . . I was experiencing a really difficult time as I felt sad and lonely when reviewing for the university entrance examination while all of my friends had gone away for their colleges, including my best friend who had gone abroad for higher education. Despite difficulties, I was determined to go on as I believed it was the right decision when I swapped one year time for something I loved and felt more comfortable with.

Much of the above excerpt reveals Ha's struggle with negative emotions after changing programmes. In particular, Ha seemed to have worried that her decision may have disappointed her parents and some friends. As well, her negative emotions preparing for the university entrance examination, also seen as factors detrimental to her learning, seemed to be overridden by her determination as soon as she realised the value of her choice. In other words, Ha had displayed her perseverance as an internal resource to counter the risks in her language learning process.

Thi and Vy are two other typical cases that can also be used to illustrate the students' demonstration of perseverance. In Vy's description of her family background, she mentioned that none of her siblings chose to study English as her reason for not having intended to study English as a major, which, as a consequence, had led to difficulties and challenges in her English learning pathway (as presented in section 5.1.1). Her description signified her perception of the challenges and difficulties she could have encountered in the course of learning English at the university level. However, Vy added to her description as follows:

> I intended to study Law, but I could not do what I expected to. As I finally chose to study this [English language], I set my own goal that I need to study it properly. I might not be as good as my peers, but if I try harder, I am sure I will have good results.

Vy seemed to show her determination more clearly later in the interview when she was describing feelings having limited her language learning as she said:

> It was like, I was overwhelmed in the early days at the university. I sometimes felt frustrated because it was difficult to learn. However, I did not give up. I tried my best

> to overcome the obstacles. . . . I thought about my peers and wondered why they were doing so well and I thought to myself that I have to be as good as them or even better.

It was evident that although English had not been Vy's preference for her undergraduate study and she had encountered challenges studying it, she had shown perseverance, reflected in not giving up but trying her best to adjust and adapt to the learning environment at the university.

Thi also shared her story in discussing the role of her family in her learning pathway and the difficulties she had learning English at the university level as follows:

> I decided to enrol in this English language education course as suggested by my mother who believed that I might be able to have a good job in the future.
>
> As soon as I started the course, I realised something funny while I was studying English language skills. "Why did I choose to study English when it seemed I knew nothing about English?" I questioned myself. In fact, I only spent five months revising my knowledge about English and as soon as I could enter university, I forgot everything.

The challenges and difficulties emerging afterwards could not undermine Thi's strong will to sustain and improve in English learning as Thi commented:

> I think as I have put my effort into it this far, I should go to the end of the journey. I mean, I made my decision to study English, I should not think about quitting. I should be committed to it because if I stopped, I would never be able to catch up with others. Furthermore, I chose to study education, which means I will be a teacher in the future. Hence, being a teacher, you should be more capable than others [to be able to teach].

What is of note in the analyses of the above four typical cases is the risk factors emerging in their learning pathways. In these cases and others, the interactional aspect of the system of foreign language learner resilience is evident.

Regarding the students' optimism, three cases of first-year students reflected their positive thinking despite difficulties. These include the cases of Ha, Vy and Ngoc.

An analysis of Vy's responses indicated that she tended to look at the positive aspect of situations which may be considered negative for others. For example, in her description of the difficulties confronting her English learning in the university environment, Vy said that she had "felt stressed" studying English listening skills with a teacher who "might scold and make [her] feel embarrassed" if she "could not give the right answers to the questions about a listening task

assigned to prepare at home before class". However, regarding the resources she had taken advantage of in overcoming difficulties, Vy seemed to show a positive attitude toward the strictness of the teacher, which was reflected in her comments that "the teachers have been a good source of support" and that although "some of them are really strict", their "strictness is to give us the impetus to learn". In another situation when she was talking about her feelings in the course of overcoming challenges, Vy asserted: "I feel like I am improving; although I know that my skills are not really good now, they are improving". Such a statement seems to reflect her optimistic outlook on her learning irrespective of the challenges she might encounter in the future.

A similar optimism can also be detected with Ha, who also featured prominently in the previous analyses of some other protective factors. She narrated:

> I quit my Economics study at the university and wasted one year, but I did not feel sad about it. . . . I think that my decision was right as it was like I swapped one year for something I loved and felt more comfortable with.

In fact, Ha also reported having suffered from feeling "sad and lonely" in the latter part of her description. However, as seen from the above excerpt, her positive attitude toward her situation and her love for English seemed to have uplifted her and made her determined to re-take the university entrance examination and enrol in the English education course.

Another of Ha's comments used as evidence for her self-awareness could also serve as an illustration of her optimism. She said:

> After class sessions when I was not able to make sense of the recordings I listened to or speak English, I reflected on such events in the evenings. I thought to myself: "OK. I was bad today. I should not be that bad anymore".

The above comment indicates Ha's optimistic thinking in that she seemed to have a positive outlook on her learning despite having performed unsatisfactorily in class. To elaborate, Ha would not have said: "I should not be that bad anymore" if she had not had faith in the effort she would put into her learning in the future, which would bring her up to a level better than what she had performed.

In Ngoc's case, her comment on the role of her family in her learning can reflect this internal resource. Adding to her comment about the passing of her father, she explained:

> Generally speaking, my family circumstance does not have much influence on my learning. With such a family circumstance, I think I should put more effort into my learning rather than being deep in melancholy and thinking too much. As I still have my mother, I must study harder.

Ngoc seemed to have been able to overcome the tragedy of losing a family member and move forward in her learning by looking at the bright side of the situation. The comment: "I still have my mother, I must study harder", seemed to reflect the positive attitude that had ensured Ngoc sustained her learning and even put more effort into it.

The above analyses reveal that although perseverance and optimism appeared in the interview data as minor themes, these two attributes should be considered as possible internal protective factors, counteracting risk factors and sequentially contributing to the interactive mechanism that shapes the complex dynamic system of resilience in foreign language learning.

5.2.6 Summary of first-year students' perceptions of protective factors

In summary, two groups of protective factors – contextual and internal protective factors were uncovered. Students' perceptions of contextual protective factors included the support and encouragement from families and school teachers, the collaborative relationship between the students and their peers, and little support from their communities. Students also reported having relied on ICT to enable their learning in response to difficulties and challenges. The exploration of interview data also highlighted the students' internal resources, seen as internal protective factors. In particular, purposefulness, initiative, resourcefulness, self-awareness, perseverance and optimism were displayed by first-year students.

This section set out to capture first-year student participants' perceptions of the protective factors as interactive counterparts of the risk factors presented in the previous sections. The findings were drawn mainly from the students' responses about the resources they had capitalised upon and the behaviours they had displayed in the presence of difficulties. Moreover, students' responses across their interviews were also looked at. Casting a wider net across the data allowed us to better see how protective factors had contributed to mitigating risk factors and shaping the developmental process of resilience in foreign language learning of the students. It is also important to note that in the presentation of the protective factors, attempts have also been made to depict the interaction among protective factors and the non-linearity and complexity of the interactive mechanism of the contextual and internal factors of both types (protective and risk).

5.3. Chapter conclusion

This chapter presents findings from interviews with 17 first-year EFL students who confirmed having been able to sustain and/or improve in learning English at the university level in the face of difficulties and challenges. The findings reveal the students' perceptions of factors both detrimental and conducive to their English learning, contributing to the development of their resilience in learning English. These include the risk and protective factors emerging from the students' interactions in multiple contexts, namely the socio-economic settings, institutions and families.

In terms of risk factors, the findings indicate the students' decrease in motivation and array of negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, or anxiety. These internal factors appeared to be in sync with the challenges and difficulties derived from the students' interactions with the aforementioned contexts.

Regarding protective factors, in addition to the support and encouragement from families, institutions and society, a majority of students reported having capitalised on the benefits of the virtual environment (ICT tools) for their learning. In drawing on those contextual resources, they also displayed their internal resources such as purposefulness, initiative, resourcefulness, self-awareness, perseverance and optimism. These protective factors functioned as a mechanism shielding them from the negative influence of contextual and individual challenges.

Also, it is important to note that in parallel with the students' perceptions of risk and protective factors, seen as the two core components of resilience in foreign language learning, the findings have also underscored the complexity of interactions. Data analysis indicated that embedded in the overarching interactive mechanism between the risk and protective factors were layers of nonlinear interactions of contextual and internal factors contributing to the development of the students' resilience.

CHAPTER 6: THE SYSTEM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNER RESILIENCE: FOURTH-YEAR STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

This chapter reports on the findings from interviews with 13 fourth-year students. It presents their perspectives on resilience in English learning. Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter first looks at contextual and individual difficulties and/or challenges seen as risk factors having limited the students' English learning. It then continues with external and internal resources perceived as protective factors having enabled their English learning. Taking into account the complexity of the interaction between factors, the risk and protective factors will be presented in relation to society/community, familial and institutional aspects of context. Importantly, protective factors will also be presented in relation to risk factors to reveal the counteractive mechanism that shapes the students' resilience in English learning at the university level in Vietnam

6.1. Fourth-year students' perception of risk factors

The examination of the interview data indicated both similarities and differences between the fourth-year students' perceptions of risk factors and those of their junior peers. Hence, in addition to reporting on the difficulties and challenges similar to those found in the data from first-year student interviews, more emphasis will be placed on the differences to highlight the fourth-year students' perceptions of difficulties and challenges featuring in their English language learning trajectories.

6.1.1. Constraints related to society/community context

Interviews with fourth-year students indicated similar challenges related to community context to those found among their junior peers, but there were also some differences in terms of the prevalence of some factors.

6.1.1.1. Disadvantages related to socio-economic and geographical conditions

Four of 13 fourth-year students reported having come from remote and disadvantaged areas. They talked about the challenges related to the socio-economic and geographical conditions of their hometowns. Similar to their junior peers, the challenges these students identified include limited or delayed English learning opportunities, lack of an engaging/supportive environment, or limited learning resources. This was illustrated by the cases of H'Nhe, H'Khuen, Tu, and Thu. These four students concurred that their English learning had been limited or delayed due

to the unfavourable geographical distance or socio-economic conditions of their hometowns. Describing the difficulties in learning English in her hometown, H'Khuen said:

> Before my enrolment at the university, I lived in a remote area. It was quite difficult for us to have access to English learning. I only started learning English when I was in Grade 6.

In a similar vein, Tu confirmed having grown up in a remote commune (the lowest administrative level in Vietnam) which she described as "quite a distance away from the city centre". "I had access to English learning when I started my lower secondary education, but people seemed not to take it very seriously", Tu continued.

Sharing a similar view, Thu elaborated on how the unfavourable conditions of her hometown had delayed her English learning:

> I was born and grew up in [a central highlands] province. Before my enrolment at this university, I studied at a high school in a district which was not developed. At that time the province was just established, detached from a bigger and more developed province. Thus, its socio-economic conditions had yet to develop. In fact, my hometown was listed as one of the most vulnerable communes for 10 years continuously. I only had access to English learning when I was in Grade 6.

In addition to limited and delayed English learning opportunities, the students also reported a lack of learning resources. Continuing the description of her hometown, Thu commented: "The conditions of my hometown influenced my English learning as the school's facilities and learning resources were inadequate". Tu stated:

> We hardly had access to recordings of spoken English. Very scarcely did the teacher give us a chance to listen to the recordings. The school's facilities were poor.

Despite coming from one of the remote districts of a Central Highland province, H'Nhe's perspective seemed to differ from her peers on the shortage of learning resources. H'Nhe said:

> I think at that time there was no Wi-Fi in my hometown, so I was not able to get online and watch video clips on YouTube, which really helps me improve a lot in learning English. In fact, I still received support from other sources which might not be as good as what I might have had on the internet. I just thought that I would be able to learn

> better if I had access to the internet. Besides, it was not easy to buy books as there were no bookshops in my place at that time.

H'Nhe's comment above indicates the students' varied need for learning resources. While some students found their English learning vulnerable to the schools' inadequate learning resources or facilities, H'Nhe believed her lack of access to the internet may have constrained her improvement in English. That is, H'Nhe had not been able to find a learning resource that could have facilitated her English learning due to the socio-economic or geographical conditions of her hometown.

The students also seemed to attribute the lack of a supportive and engaging learning environment to the disadvantageous conditions of their hometowns. This was reflected in H'Khuen, Thu and Tu's comments. For example, both H'Khuen and Thu believed that they had been exposed to limited English and English learning opportunities because of the domination of languages used in their communities, including local languages and Vietnamese. They respectively said:

> Most of us were ethnic minority people; we communicated mostly in our mother tongue and Vietnamese; we did not use English.

and

> As Kinh people [the Vietnamese ethnic majority] were fewer than local ethnic people, I was surrounded by an environment where Vietnamese was not frequently used to communicate, let alone English.

H'Khuen and Thu's comments above suggest their perception of a lack of an engaging or supportive English learning environment in their communities. This could serve to explain some first-year students' claim that their ethnic minority peers "had not taken learning [English] seriously". Likewise, Tu confirmed that "people [in her hometown] did not take it [learning English] seriously. She said: "I felt as if we were not inspired by the teachers there". These statements indicated Tu's disappointment with the unsupportive learning environment in her hometown.

6.1.1.2. Lack of an environment for authentic English communication practice

Eight of 13 fourth-year students reported having experienced a lack of an environment for authentic English language communication practice in their hometowns, as compared to five of

the 17 first-year students. Interestingly, these eight fourth-year students reported having come from urban areas, more conducive to learning English than the remote and rural areas of the junior peers. The fourth-year students assumed that their limited opportunity for authentic English communication practice derived from a limited number of English speaking foreigners in their hometowns, which some attributed to their hometown tourist industry attracting fewer foreign visitors than other big cities in the country. Huyen expressed her discontent as follows:

> One of the biggest challenges to my English learning living here was the limited opportunity for practising English with native English speakers. When I communicate with Vietnamese people, I have to use Vietnamese. It would be unreasonable to communicate with a Vietnamese in English. If there were native English speakers in my hometown, I would be able to practise my English with them.

Sharing her disappointment about the lack of opportunities to practise English, Lan recalled:

> When I was in Grade 12, there were very few foreigners here. . . . [L]earning English was simply studying at school, then doing homework. There was not a chance to communicate with anyone who was proficient or could speak the language fluently.

Minh described in more detail how the lack of an environment for practising English had influenced her learning and her confidence. She commented:

> [L]living in big cities would probably give you more chances to interact with foreigners, thus making you feel it [communication in English] is natural. This was not the case here where you could scarcely meet foreigners, leading to fear of communicating in English. The lack of an environment to communicate in English made [us] feel scared of using English to communicate.

Other students elaborated on the challenges of opportunities to speak English. Rahlan confirmed having had "no environment for authentic communication in English", and An reported, "very few opportunities to practise English, especially with native English speakers". They concurred that such limited opportunities for authentic communication had to do with the tourism industry in their hometowns. While Rahlan believed that the "not-very-well-developed tourist industry of the city limited the number of foreign tourists", An assumed that "the tourist industry here [her hometown] was not so developed as some other places, which restricted the opportunities to interact with foreigners". Despite his similar assumption about the drawback

of so few foreigners, Tin compared his hometown (also the location of his university) and a city he once visited. Tin said:

> I think living here was a disadvantage for me compared to those living in other big cities. For example, I used to visit a city where I could see a lot of foreign visitors and if I had lived in that city, I would have been able to benefit from that, as an English language learner, by spending more time looking for opportunities to communicate in English with the [English-speaking] visitors. I could not do it here when I was a high school student.

In summary, fourth-year students, despite having grown up and studied in more favourable socio-economic and geographical areas than their junior peers, still felt that they had been deprived of the opportunities to practise English in an authentic communication environment. This indicates the students' perception of a risk factor emerging from social interactions in their community regardless of their place of origin.

6.1.2. Constraints related to family

A small number of fourth-year students reported having experienced difficulties and challenges derived from their interactions with their family. This aligns with findings from first-year students. Constraints related to familial aspects of context include difficulties derived from the students' familial upheavals, parental divorces and families' financial conditions. However, fourth-year students seemed to stand out with respect to their perception of the lack of support or guidance from their families.

6.1.2.1. Familial upheavals and parental divorces as hindrances

Thuya and An are two students who found their English learning pathways vulnerable to a range of family issues, including family upheavals, parental divorces and family dysfunction. Thuya believed that her "family circumstance had a great impact on [her] learning". Although she did not elaborate much, she briefly described two incidents that seemed to have had a long-term impact on her. Firstly, the divorce of her parents seemed to give her a growing feeling of inferiority because of growing up in a single-parent family. Thuya recollected:

> My family was not the same as others. My parents got divorced in 2005 when I was quite young. I did not pay much attention to it [my parental divorce] when I was little, but as I was growing up, I felt more disadvantaged than my peers. I had to try harder in learning than others.

Thuya's second familial upheaval was the death of her grandmother for whom she had had great affection. Thuya said: "I was totally depressed when my grandmother passed away".

Although Thuya did not explain explicitly how her learning had been affected by these events, her comment "my family circumstance had a great impact on my learning" implied that her learning could have been influenced by the negative emotions arising from these events.

An's story about her family seemed a little more complex in terms of the impact of her family issues on her learning. An recounted:

> My father remarried when I was young. I have two older brothers and one half brother. I lived with my father and stepmother in SG city when I was in Grade 1. We then returned to this city [her hometown] when I was in Grade 5. As I was not living with my [biological] mother, I became more reticent and did not talk much with my parents especially about my studies. Four years ago, my father passed away.

The above quote about An's family background revealed that living away from her mother and the passing away of her father had a strong impact on her learning pathway. An talked about her interactions with her family members, which helped unveil more about the influences of her family's circumstances on her learning. She recalled:

> There have been good and bad times in my life, but I could not share any of those with my family members because I did not want to disturb them. I thought that each member in my family had their own business to worry about and I just did not want them to worry about me. . . . My father loved me the most because I was his youngest daughter. Since my father passed away, my mother has moved in to live with us [me and my stepmother]. However, as my mother did not live with me when I was little, her love for me seems not the same as what I had from my father. My stepmother does not show any affection to me. It feels like I am a stranger to her. My stepmother and I sometimes have arguments which really upset me. In general, my stepmother and I have not had a good relationship. When my father was still alive, he took very good care of me. I did not have to worry about anything, so I performed well in my studies. I have been feeling down and thinking of dropping out several times since my father's passing away. All [these things] seem to make me feel like giving up.

The above description of her interaction with different family members reflects the emergence of An's characteristics and emotions that appeared to be detrimental to her learning. These

individual factors seemed to have stemmed from her broken family and the fact that she had little or no connection with her biological mother. This subsequently led to her reticence as seen in the earlier quote about her family and the above description of her family relationships. Also, the not-so-good relationship between An and her stepmother seemed to contribute to the depression she had been suffering as a result of losing her father. In brief, An's story indicated her perception of the challenges emerging from her interactions with her family members. These include a reserved characteristic and negative emotions that hindered her language learning.

6.1.2.2. Families's financial difficulty as a constraint

Two fourth-year students, H'Nhe and Tu, found their English learning vulnerable to the financial difficulties of their families. H'Nhe described how the economic condition of her family had restrained her from a further English learning opportunity as follows:

> There are five people in my family, including my parents and my two sisters. My parents were farmers, but my father has stopped working for 20 years now because of his illness. My mother and older sister are working as the breadwinners in the family. I think my family's economic status did influence my English learning. For example, I could not afford to buy things that could help me learn English better or to pay for an extra English course to improve my English skills as some of my friends did. In brief, it was mainly about the financial difficulty of my family.

Tu asserted that "the family's financial condition [had been] one of the main difficulties" for her learning. She said that her family had been "categorised as a poor household by the local government". In order for her to be able to study, Tu said that her "younger brother had to drop out at Grade 10". In another situation when Tu spoke about her thinking and feelings related to overcoming challenges, she confirmed that financial difficulty had been the major constraint for her as she said:

> My difficulty was mainly about finance. I have been often short of money at the end of the month. Sometimes, the money I earn a month from working [part-time] was not enough, so I managed to borrow from friends and return it to them the month after that.

Tu had attempted to improve the situation by keeping herself less dependent on financial support from her family as she reported: "I only needed support from my family in the first year at university. Since I started my second year, I have managed to make some money for my

studies and daily expenditure". However, the financial difficulty persisted as she still had to "borrow money from friends". In short, struggling with making ends meet could have limited Tu's learning process.

6.1.2.3. Lack of familial support/encouragement and/or guidance

It was interesting to find that while first-year students tended to discuss the lack of family support in relation to specific familial issues, some fourth-year students talked about the influences of families on their English learning without linking them to particular familial issues.

Despite initially stating in the description of her family's role in her English learning that she had not faced any difficulties or challenges from her family, Minh commented later that she had lacked guidance in learning from them. Her description went as follows:

> Generally, there was no difficulty or challenge. It was all about my parents' business. They were very busy in the high trading season of the year, so they did not pay much attention [to me]. It could be because they had confidence in me, they just let me take care of myself, thus my learning. . . . They never mentioned or suggested taking extra English courses for improvement. I felt as if I was lacking in guidance [in learning] from the family.

Minh's description above neither shows a sign of a broken family nor signals any upheaval or financial crisis in her family. However, Minh seemed to implicitly blame her parents for not giving her good support for her learning.

Likewise, Nguyen talked at length about her brothers' learning experiences, which suggested a perceived lack of guidance from her family in learning English.

> I have three brothers who are 15, 13 and 10 years older than me. . . . My oldest brother failed his entrance examination for his master's degree education because he could not pass the English test. This had a great impact on me as I started to believe that English must be so difficult that a good student like my brother could not pass the English test. I also found difficulty in learning it as the writing was different from Vietnamese which made it difficult for me to memorise. As my other two brothers were also not successful in learning the language, I kept believing that English must be very difficult to learn. In addition, my mother, who had no idea about English, could not give me advice or suggestion on learning the language. She was just like other parents in my hometown

> who did not put English learning as a priority, and thus did not give advice or encouragement.

Nguyen's description indicates her perception of a lack of guidance from her family in learning English. In particular, her brothers' failure to learn English seemed to have contributed to building up her negative emotion about learning the language. Moreover, seeking advice or guidance from her mother would have also been unfeasible as Nguyen's mother had not considered English learning important for her daughter' future.

H'Nhe tended not to attribute her previously described family's financial difficulty completely to her perception of a lack of support from the family. When asked how her family had played a part in her language learning, H'Nhe said:

> I could also sense that my family did not support me . . . not invest [in my English learning]. It was not just because of financial difficulty, but because [of their] . . . different ways of thinking. For example, they would not let me go long distances for a course more because of worrying too much about my safety than because of the financial problem.

In another situation when H'Nhe was talking about the individual factors seen as challenges to her language learning, she made her point clearly about how her family had failed to encourage her English learning.

> I am sometimes a little cold in communication [not sociable]. I don't feel like communicating with friends. I think it is a part of my personality. I am quite timid. I believe this personality characteristic could have been derived from my family. People in my family just tried to stop me from doing this and that, which made me timid. This subsequently influenced my English learning as I was not able to find a friend who could learn English with me. I think learning English with a friend would make me feel more confident.

H'Nhe's responses above indicate her perception that her family's lack of encouragement in that the family's "worrying too much about her safety", instead, turned out to limit her English learning as it subsequently resulted in her timidity/shyness in communication.

Similarly, Tin also talked at length about how his family had failed to emotionally support him in learning English. Tin reported having struggled to find time to learn due to helping his parents with the family's business. He also feared that after graduating, he would end up like his brother,

who had to quit his job as a Physical Education teacher and had returned to assist with the family's business. Regarding his family background, Tin said:

> My family has a shop in the market. My parents are always busy with the business from dawn to dusk, thus my daily routines are influenced. If I don't go to school, I should be helping my parents at the shop. I can only take some free time at midday to learn instead of taking a nap. If I want to concentrate on my study, I just can do it after finishing all the work after 8 pm. . . . My brother's English was not good, so he was not of much help in giving advice or guidance on learning English.

The above description indicates Tin's sense not only of study time constraints but also of a lack of support or encouragement from his family. Tin confirmed this when describing his feelings in the face of challenges:

> I am not encouraged. Sometimes I feel like I do not have enough time to study. Although no one in the family forced me to help with the family's business, I felt uneasy to leave the work behind and go for my learning. I can only study just before 9 pm.

Tin kept talking about the constraint of study time. He seemed to expect his family's encouragement, and to feel that his parents took his assistance with the business for granted. Further, when asked how his family background had played a part in his English learning, Tin responded as follows:

> My parents were thinking that if I worked as a teacher after graduation, I would not be able to earn a good living just like my brother. My brother earned his Bachelor's degree in Physical Education and worked as a PE teacher at a primary school for two years or something, then my father talked him into quitting the job to help my parents with the business. I guess my father could have thought that my brother could earn more money running the family's business than being a teacher. This made me think that the same situation might happen to me. I really want to work after graduating from university, yet my father just tries to talk me into his assumption that I can earn more money working in the family's business than working outside. All of these things put a lot of pressure on me. I really want to get out of this.

Tin considered his father's pressure as a hindrance to his English learning, and this seemed to contribute to the stress he had been suffering from, being troubled by what had happened to his

brother. Tin's psychological state was reflected clearly in his description of the feelings that had limited his language learning in the face of challenges.

> Thinking of the prospect of being forced by my dad to work in the family's business after graduating from university really frustrated me. I have been struggling with that thinking and silently fighting against my father's expectation. . . . I feel frustrated because of not being supported by the family.

In general, the above fourth-year students' perspectives on the lack of familial support, encouragement or guidance seem to differ them from their junior peers whose perceptions of challenges or difficulties from familial contexts were mainly linked to familial adversity. This finding adds to the inventory of risk factors derived from familial contexts, contributing to the refinement of the system of foreign language learner resilience.

6.1.3. Constraints related to institutional contexts

Fourth-year students' perceptions of challenges and difficulties related to institutional contexts share similarities with those of first-year students. In particular, fourth-year students also reported difficulties related to interactions with their teachers (both high school and university) and the learning resources and programmes; constraints derived from interactions with teachers emerged as a predominant theme. Apart from the similarities, differences between fourth-year students and first-year students' perspectives were also detected, especially those related to learning resources and programmes. However, in order to contrast the fourth-year students' perspectives with those of the first-year students, more emphasis will be placed on the differences.

6.1.3.1. The students and their high school teachers

As with their junior peers, the fourth year students believed that their English learning had been constrained by the teaching practices in high school, of which traditional and grammar-focused practice was found to be the most prevalent. Twelve of 13 interview students reported having experienced grammar-focused English learning at high school. The following extract from the interview with Rahlan encapsulates the perspective of the majority:

> I started learning English in Grade 6. The difficulty of learning English at that time was that it focused too much on grammar. There was no opportunity to practise speaking English with the teachers or native English speakers. The only device available for learning and teaching was a cassette player with which we sometimes had the

> opportunity to listen to native English voices. The learning environment was only favourable for the development of writing, reading, and grammatical structures, but listening and speaking. . . . The language used for teaching was Vietnamese. Grammatical structures were all explained in Vietnamese. Rarely did the teachers organise games or activities that engaged us in language learning.

As a result of teaching practices such as those mentioned by Rahlan, many of the fourth-year students reported having suffered from deficient English skills, perceived as disadvantageous for learning English at the university level, especially listening and speaking. Ngoc shared her experience:

> All I knew about English was its grammar, but I could not put that knowledge into practice to communicate. . . . I enrolled in the undergraduate programme of English language at the university where I had to do a lot of courses in English language skills. As there was a big gap between what I had obtained previously and what I was expected to perform in the courses, I was in a terrible crisis. I was completely overwhelmed because it was like everything was new to me and I had to start all over again.

Ngoc's feeling of being overwhelmed could be seen as a consequence of the high school teachers' grammar-focused teaching practice which had failed to prepare the students for their learning at a higher level. Other detrimental emotions such as a lack of confidence or anxiety learning English at the university level due to deficient English language skills can also be found in Huyen, Minh, and An's responses. For example, Huyen asserted: "I do not feel confident to communicate in English. I am afraid that I may not make sense to people". Likewise, Minh confirmed that the feeling of "shyness" had hindered her English learning. Minh explained that she had been "unconfident and nervous in speaking English" because of having been "afraid of making mistakes". The interrelationship between the students' negative emotions and their deficiency in English skills due to high school teaching practices was reflected clearly in An's detailed description of her English language learning experience:

> The biggest challenge for me in learning English at university has been speaking English. I have completed four English speaking courses as prescribed in the training programme. However, I always felt so tense when I took the speaking test. I have always felt unconfident about my English speaking. Speaking English has been the most challenging task for me.

Some fourth-year students shared with their first-year peers a similar perspective on the lack of (in-class) support from the teachers at the secondary education level. Five fourth-year students concurred that their English learning in high school had been susceptible to the "lack of enthusiasm" or "unsupportive" teaching practice of the teachers. For example, H'Nhe and Tu respectively commented that their high school teachers were "not enthusiastic in their teaching" and "failed to motivate the students". Sharing the same view, Minh expressed the frustration that she had felt as if she had "not [been] able to learn anything" because her high school teachers "seemed superficial in their teaching as they just tried to finish the coursebook".

An seemed to include her perception of a lack of in-class support while expressing her dissatisfaction with the inconsistency between what she had been offered to learn in class with the tests she had taken. She said:

> I felt that what I learned in class did not quite go hand in hand with what I was asked to do in the examinations. What I was offered to learn in class was simple, but the tests were so difficult. Eventually, students like me had to register for extra classes.

In the above excerpt, An explicitly ascribed the mismatch between the teaching and the assessment to the difficulty she had experienced learning English in high school through the images of "simple" class content and "difficult" tests. More importantly, she seemed to imply that the teachers' lack of enthusiasm or support had failed to provide her with adequate knowledge for the examinations. Lan believed that it was because of this lack of support that she had had to take "extra classes". An's justification seems in line with that of some first-year students who attributed the "extra classes" to the teachers' lack of in-class support.

Lan, another fourth-year student, seemed to give another justification for the above view on the lack of in-class support. Recalling her high school English learning, Lan said:

> I felt that the time at school was so limited that the teachers could not complete the lesson. The time allotted for each period was only forty-five minutes, so it was impossible for the teachers to teach everything. As a result, we had to take extra classes.

Lan's comment seems to imply sympathy for her school teachers. Instead of blaming the teachers for inadequate teaching practice, Lan tended to shift the blame onto the imbalance between the allotted time and the amount of knowledge that the teachers had had to convey. Although the "extra classes" were mentioned again in Lan's statement, the image of "extra classes" was more like a solution to Lan's problem than something that was triggered by the

unsupportive teaching practice of the teachers as in An's comment and as perceived by the first-year students. Lan's perspective reflects her presumably reasonable justification for the issue of in-class support that had hindered her language learning.

The fact that Lan's comment touched on the issue of knowledge distribution within the limited class time unexpectedly casts doubt on the way in which English language programmes are planned in the curriculum and the time allocated to them. This especially becomes more relevant when we relate this perspective to An's comment on design issues such as "simple" in-class learning, "difficult tests" and "extra classes", which serve as an illustration of her perception of the mismatch between the teaching practice and assessment.

The teachers' lack of in-class support was also reflected in the comments of Ngoc and Tin. However, they were of the view that English had been "treated [implicitly] as an unimportant/minor subject in high school", which contributed to the teachers' demotivation and lack of enthusiasm. The students' elaboration introduces another insight into the lack of in-class support from the high school teachers, which also distances fourth-year students from their junior peers who tended to see the phenomenon of the teachers' "private extra classes" as an antecedent of the teachers' lack of in-class support.

The differing perspectives on the teachers' lack of support not only open up another possibility to look at the probable risk factors derived from the interaction between the students and institutional contexts but also reflect the nonlinearity and complexity of the interactive subsystems in action in the complex system of foreign language learner resilience.

6.1.3.2. The students and their university teachers

Fourth-year students reported having been exposed to traditional or disengaging teaching methods, a mismatch between teaching and assessment, and teachers' discouraging ways of giving feedback. While the first two difficulties appear similar to those identified by first-year students, the fourth-year students' perspectives about the latter difficulty differ from those of their junior peers.

Nine fourth-year students shared the belief that some teachers' teaching practice had been either confusing or had failed to engage them in the learning process. For example, Thuya expressed her disappointment at the difficulties learning English at the university level:

> In terms of teaching methods, some teachers' teaching really confused me. . . . Their teaching methods seemed traditional as sometimes we just did nothing but listen to their lecture. We were not even able to take notes as their lectures seemed so general.

Despite her acknowledgement of the dedication of the teachers, Lan, also showed her dissatisfaction when she shared a similar story:

> Many of the English language skills teachers were really good. However, there were some whose teaching practice was like throwing a bunch of materials for us to work on then briefly explaining when we had done with those. They were just teaching in a traditional manner without organising any activities to engage or make us more active in learning.

In a similar vein, H'Nha also commented on her experience of learning with university teachers:

> There are very good teachers, but there are also those whose pronunciation I could not make sense of. In addition, it felt like some teachers were not very enthusiastic in their teaching, especially those who taught us difficult subjects. They were unlikely to inspire us.

The students' comments above represent fourth-year students' perception of the traditional or disengaging teaching methods as a difficulty emerging from interacting with their teachers at the university. Data analysis also revealed an array of negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment or demotivation that the students had experienced. These findings were in line with what was discovered in the analysis of interviews with first-year students.

It is worth noting that one fourth-year student expressed her dissatisfaction with the mismatch between teaching and assessment. An showed deep frustration in her comparison of two teachers.

> I would like to talk a little more about my experiences in learning American and British cultures. I learned American Culture with Mr Smith (pseudonym). . . . He tended to emphasise the themes or topics he would ask in the end-of-course test. Conversely, the British Culture teacher taught us aspects of British culture. Seventy per cent of the questions in the end-of-course test were about British history, which was not in line with what she had taught. . . . It was that problem that frustrated us as we could not see any good results out of learning the subject.

Again, An's story about her learning experience resembles that shared by a first-year student, Thi, who also reported inconsistency between the teaching and assessment in learning English listening skills with her teacher. An's case shares another similarity with that of a junior peer in that it is only a minor case in the data. However, the discovery of the case can serve as a reinforcement for a risk that students of both cohorts had encountered in their English learning pathways.

An also talked at length about her disappointment regarding the teachers' discouraging ways of giving feedback on English writing. An recalled:

> [This] was related to my experience in learning writing skill in my first year at the university. It was like the teacher had a high expectation of our competence while we were actually at a very low level and needed more guidance and support. Especially, we expected the teacher to give us some positive feedback before pointing out the weaknesses. However, I felt that the teachers were quite straightforward in giving feedback, very serious and especially too strict in their marking, which limited our learning, demotivated us and prevented us from making an effort. I remember when I studied writing with Ms Katherine (pseudonym); she seemed more flexible in giving feedback and marking . . . that made us feel more confident and motivated us to learn.

Once again, this finding is minor in the interview data. However, it helps distinguish the fourth-year students' perceptions from those of the first-years and contributes to the inventory of the risk factors limiting foreign (English) language learner resilience at the university level in Vietnam.

6.1.3.3. The students and their peers

Seven fourth-year students claimed that their relationship or interactions with peers had influenced their language learning. In particular, the students reported having been constrained from learning English mainly by their peers' lack of engagement or initiative. For example, Ngoc claimed that people in her hometown were "not very proactive in learning English". This comment supports her belief about an unsupportive environment for learning English in her hometown. However, Ngoc further described her peers' behaviour in the university classroom to confirm that her language learning had been influenced by their lack of initiative. Ngoc stated:

> Rarely do we communicate in English in class because many of my classmates are not proactive in speaking English. They might feel shy in speaking the language because they are afraid of not being able to express thoroughly what they want to say.

Ngoc later reiterated this point describing her learning experience at the university level.

Likewise, Minh seemed disappointed by her peers' lack of engagement and initiative when sharing her perspective on the difficulties in learning English at the university level. She commented:

> We are often recommended to speak English with each other in daily conversations so that speaking English would gradually become a habit. However, the students here seem not interested in this. They quickly switch to Vietnamese when they are not assigned a particular task that requires them to use English.

Similar comments about the lack of engagement were also found in Thu and Nguyen's responses below:

> They are supposed to love English because they chose to study it as a major. However, they tend not to speak the language very much. Only a few can speak very limited English in the classroom. Most of them switch to Vietnamese which is much easier for them to communicate.

and

> Sometimes I really wanted to practise speaking English with my classmates during class time, but many of them were afraid of speaking English. I think they were afraid of making mistakes, or they might worry about not being able to express the ideas properly. Even though I was eager to speak English, I became demotivated and frustrated because of my peers' lack of confidence.

Nguyen's description also includes a justification for their peers' lack of engagement. This seems to be a similar perspective to that of the first-year students who assumed that peers' lack of engagement derived from their fear of making mistakes, which was attributable to the teachers' teaching practice.

It is important to highlight the comments from one student describing her learning as having been influenced by the lack of collaboration with her peers. In addition to her comment about

her deficient English skills having limited her language learning at university, Tu confirmed that she had been challenged by a lack of collaboration from her classmates. Tu said:

> I sometimes find it hard to work in teams with my classmates. It is like we only work in teams when we are under the supervision of the teacher in the classroom. When I am home, I still want to practise English more with my classmates, but it seems so difficult to form a team to practise speaking and listening together because each of us has our own business. Also, I don't think the teamwork in our class is working effectively. We tend to learn individually rather than collaboratively.

Tu's comment above reveals another perspective on difficulties emerging from the interaction among fourth-year students. This perspective on the lack of collaboration also helps distinguish the fourth-year students' perspective from their junior peers. It contributes to the list of probable risk factors triggering the process of resilience in foreign language learning in the context of teaching and learning English at the university level in Vietnam.

6.1.3.4. The students and the learning resources/facilities and programme

In addition to the issues such as limited learning resources or facilities and inappropriate practice and policy on assessment weighting (similar to the first-year student interview data), fourth-year students reported pressure from testing and assessment (in high school), large class sizes, and again, the lack of an environment for language practice (at university level).

Regarding the limited learning resources and facilities supporting language learning, four students described these as having hindered their language learning. For example, Thu said that her English "learning materials included nothing more than a coursebook". Similarly, Lan believed that "the limited facilities and learning materials" had challenged her English learning because she had not been able to have access to "mobile devices" or "the internet to search for further learning materials", but had been "dependent on the materials distributed by the teacher". Lan also confirmed that the classroom facilities had been limited as she said that her "class would have to move to the only classroom equipped with an overhead projector when the teacher was having a class observation [for professional development purposes]". "Otherwise the class stayed in the ordinary classroom" Lan continued. By "ordinary classroom" Lan meant that there had been only tables and chairs in her classroom. In a similar vein, H'Nhe maintained that the facilities in her high school classroom had not been beneficial for language learning as she stated: "The classroom was fairly good, but it was not equipped with any facilities beneficial for English learning".

In addition, one fourth-year student, Minh, showed dissatisfaction with the learning resources at the university where she was studying, which she described as "not diverse", maintaining that she could find more learning materials outside the university. Minh's claim seems in line with some of her junior peers who also confirmed the limited variety of materials for English learning in the university library.

Ngoc was the only fourth-year student who mentioned the issue of inappropriate practice and policy on assessment weighting. She showed her discontent when commenting about how her learning effort had been evaluated by the assessment system at the university:

> I think that the assessment system at the university is unfair because the results of the summative tests take up 90 per cent while the formative tests which evaluate the process of learning during the course only account for 10 per cent of the total result of the course. Take English speaking as an example, I performed quite well during the course, but I received a low mark in the final test because I picked a topic I had little knowledge about. This affected my effort for the whole course. I don't think the assessment system is appropriate.

As this issue was also discussed by one of the first-year students, Ngoc's comment above helps confirm that the assessment system at the university had influenced their English learning, creating negative feelings which may have demotivated their efforts in learning.

Fourth-year students differed from their first-year peers in their perception of the pressure from high school testing and assessment, large class sizes at both levels, and the lack of an environment for practising English at their university. While the students' perception of the lack of an environment for practising English was found prevalent in the data, the two former difficulties were detected in the responses of fewer students.

Minh was the only fourth-year student who reported having been stressed by examinations at the high school level. Minh recalled:

> The pressure of testing and assessment in high school influenced my English learning. It made me feel worried too much about the result. While you can sit for the test a second time at the university, you can only do it once in high school. I felt really stressed with the testing and assessment in high school.

Minh's description of her high school learning experience also seemed to reflect her assumption of the inflexibility of the testing and assessment system.

It was interesting to find that while first-year students did not discuss the issue of class sizes in their interviews, five fourth-year students described large class sizes as having hindered their language learning at both high school and university. For example, Rahlan and Lan stated that their classes at high school had included "40 to 50 students" and "more than 40 students" respectively. Although their statements were brief, they serve to illustrate the students' perception of large class sizes as having hindered their language learning.

Huyen, Minh and H'Khuen tended to be more specific in their statements when they talked about the issue of big class sizes at the university. Huyen, for example, said with discontent: "For the class of Cross-culture analysis, I guess there were around 100 students in the class." In a similar vein, Minh explained how large class sizes had influenced her learning :

> In some classes, the number of students was so big that you would not be able to hear the lecture or see the teacher's notes on the board if you had to sit at the back.

While initially saying, "I don't see it as a difficulty", H'Khuen, when prompted, elaborated on the issue with an example of her speaking class:

> In studying speaking, as the class was so crowded, we did not have many opportunities to practise speaking. For example, the speaking class normally lasted for two periods. When we were assigned speaking tasks to work in teams, we did not have enough time to exchange ideas. It seemed we had little time to work in teams and practise speaking.

The analysis above indicates that large class sizes could be another risk perceived by fourth-year students as having influenced their English learning.

It is worth highlighting that some students reported the lack of environment for practising English when they talked about their hometowns, as well as when they spoke about the learning experience at the university level. For example, Rahlan, expressed his disappointment with the lack of an environment to practise English at the university with an unfinished but interpretable comment: "Learning a lot of English without practising it is like . . .".

Lan seemed more explicit about this difficulty:

> The environment for us to practise English is limited, only when we are in the classroom. There are very few English clubs at our university. There was actually one club. However, its operation was not very effective. The club did not attract many participants and the meetings were not organised frequently.

It is also important to note that the quotes used as evidence for the students' perception of peers' lack of engagement in learning can also illustrate the students' perception of the lack of an environment for practising English at the university. For example, Ngoc stated: "I want to emphasise that there is not an environment for practising English skills". She later elaborated:

> There were no activities that could boost the use of English in the class. It was like you do not use the language naturally but are forced to speak the language. For example, in an English speaking class, I might feel under pressure if the teacher forces me to speak English by setting the rule that I will be punished for not speaking English. I think in such classes, it would be better if the students took the initiative in speaking English rather than being forced to do so. In fact, the disadvantage is that the students are not proactive in using English in class.

What can be seen from Ngoc's description includes her sense of a lack of authentic English communication activities in her classroom. Although Ngoc seemed to imply that such a lack could have had to do with the teaching practice, she may also have wanted to associate this lack with the lack of initiative from her classmates.

Tu's description of her learning experience at the university also reflected her perception of a lack of an environment to practice English and her disappointment when she said:

> Sometimes I feel frustrated with my study. It could be because there is no one to collaborate with. Here I have no friends who could communicate with me in English. Especially there are no foreigners.

Such a perspective can also be detected in the responses of Minh and Nguyen, whose comments were used in the previous section in relation to the lack of engagement in learning among their peers.

The students' disappointment at the lack of an English communication environment at the university seemed serious, as can be seen in Thu's description when she said:

> When I started my study at the university, I felt I was not offered to learn what I had expected. . . . Although I study English at the university level, I have no opportunity to . . . use English authentically as I expected.

In summary, the above analysis sought to unveil the fourth-year students' perception of the lack of an environment for language practice at the university. The students seemed to have a sense

that the university training programme failed to create a collaborative communication environment for them to practise and improve their English.

6.1.4. Summary of fourth-year students' perceptions of risk factors

This section reports on the fourth-year students' perspectives on the factors that hindered their English learning processes, and where appropriate, compares and contrasts these with those of first-year students. In light of the CDST perspective in this study, the analysis of the interview data focused on the interaction between the students and entities in society/community, familial and institutional contexts. This helps unpack the complexity of the interactions between the contextual and individual factors.

In summary, fourth-year and first-year students concurred in the belief that their English learning pathways had been influenced by factors from the community context such as a lack of an environment for authentic English communication practice, limited or delayed English learning opportunities, lack of an engaging and/or supportive environment, or limited learning resources. In terms of the familial contexts, fourth-year students also found their language learning process had been vulnerable to issues such as familial upheavals and parental divorces, and financial difficulty of the family. With respect to institutional constraints, the fourth-year students shared with their junior peers the perspectives on the teaching practices of teachers at both secondary and university levels, lack of engagement of their peers, limited learning resources and facilities, and inappropriate practice and policy on assessment weighting of the university.

Regarding differences, fourth-year students found their language learning more vulnerable to the lack of an environment for authentic English communication practice than delayed learning opportunities, limited access to English learning resources or lack of an engaging learning environment. This can be explained by the fact that a large number of fourth-year students reported coming from urban or socio-geographically favourable areas. Concerning the challenges and difficulties from familial contexts, the lack of familial support/encouragement/guidance in English learning emerged as a perspective that distinguished the fourth-year students' perceptions from those of their first-year peers. In terms of institutionally-related constraints, subtle differences between fourth-year and first-year students' perspectives were detected in the fourth-year students' descriptions of their interactions with their peers, their teachers, the learning resources/facilities and the training programme. These included a lack of collaboration in learning, the teachers' discouraging way

of giving feedback, the pressure from testing and assessment (in high school), the large class sizes, and the lack of an environment for language practice (at university level). It is worth noting that the perception of a probable drawback in the high school English programme was also detected in a student's description of the lack of support from her high school teacher. In particular, the student's commentary on the issue of knowledge dissemination within the limited class time may have reflected her perspective on the design of the high school English programme.

The differences found in the fourth year students' data have contributed to further building the inventory of probable challenges and difficulties confronting the students in the process of English learning. These students' distinctive perspectives on the risk factors reflect the variation and non-linear interaction of the subsystems within the complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience

6.2. Fourth-year students' perceptions of protective factors

As with the data from interviews with first-year students, interviews with fourth-year students also revealed the students' perception of protective factors that could be grouped into contextual and internal ones. These two groups of protective factors are presented separately in order to unpack the system of resilience to a level at which its components are exposed. Despite the separate presentation of contextual and internal protective factors, this section also works to capture the interwoven relationship between contextual and internal protective factors while focusing more on highlighting the interaction between the protective factors and risk factors to represent the complex system of foreign language learner resilience.

6.2.1. Protective factors from familial aspects of context

Interviews with fourth-year students revealed seven of 13 fourth-year students believed that they had been supported and encouraged by their parents or one of their family members. This number is smaller than that of the first-year students who reported having sensed the support and encouragement from their families.

6.2.1.1. Parental support and encouragement

Four of the seven fourth-year students confirmed that they had been supported and encouraged by their parents in learning English. This perspective can be illustrated by the responses of Rahlan, Ngoc, Thu and Thuya.

Thuya confirmed that her "mother is the one who has given a lot of support in learning English . . . [and] always encouraged and showed concern about [her] future" which was reflected in her mother's statement: "You need to take control of your future." This source of support contributed to mitigating the risk factors derived from the upheavals in her family as reflected in her statement: "My family circumstance had a great impact on my learning".

The cases of Rahlan, Ngoc and Thu seemed slightly different from the case of Thuya in that they had grown up in more favourable familial contexts as gleaned from their descriptions of their family backgrounds. In particular, Rahlan, Ngoc and Thu had been brought up by "public-employee" parents who were described as having taken an interest in their English learning. Rahlan, in commenting on the role of his family in his English learning, said:

> My father likes English, so he trained me to learn English by having me watch cartoon movies in English when I was little. Generally, my family are very supportive of my English learning. There are no difficulties on the part of my family.

Both Ngoc and Thu reported having become aware of the importance of learning English since their parents were also working as public employees. For example, talking about her family, Ngoc said with pride:

> My parents are public employees. Hence, I have been taken good care of in terms of my learning. . . . My parents also want me to learn English as they believe that [being able to communicate in] English will offer me more opportunities in the future.

Later in the interview, describing the resources she had taken advantage of in the course of overcoming difficulties and challenges, Ngoc commented:

> Firstly, it was thanks to my parents. Although they realised the disadvantages of studying this major here [in her hometown], they tended to encourage me a lot. They have always motivated me with encouragement like, "despite the disadvantages, you have already chosen to study here, so try your best to overcome difficulties and go to the end of your journey".

Likewise, Thu talked excitedly about her family:

> Despite living in an area with extreme socio-economic difficulties, my parents who are public employees have always raised the awareness of the importance of learning English for me. In addition, my brother was also very good at English. . . . My parents

> often give me encouragement and support. When they discovered that I was interested in English, they asked my brother teach me English even although I did not have English at school at that time.

Rahlan, Ngoc and Thu's descriptions indicated that their parents had not only given them support and encouragement but had nurtured and raised their awareness of the importance of English learning as well. This appears to differ from Thuya, whose mother's encouragement and support seemed not particularly about English learning. Furthermore, it could be inferred from Rahlan, Ngoc and Thu's descriptions that they seemed to have received consistent and long-term support and encouragement from their parents throughout their English learning trajectories. However, Thuya's acknowledgement of her mother's support and encouragement as reported in her mother's advice to her: "You need to take control of your future", seemed more like the positive effect of general support that Thuya had taken the initiative to capitalise upon.

Regardless of this subtle difference, all four students' accounts reveal their perception of the support and encouragement from their parents. While Thuya tended to have proactively taken advantage of her mother's encouragement to surpass her family upheavals and get motivated in learning English, the other three students appeared to have received their parents' support and encouragement as reinforcement for their ability to bounce back from the aforementioned risk factors such as the lack of an environment for authentic English communication, grammar-focused teaching practice or disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. This reflects the interaction between the protective and risk factors that built up their resilience in learning English.

6.2.1.2. Other sources of inspiration from families

In addition to the encouragement and support from their parents, three students tended to take other family members as their sources of inspiration. For example, Minh mentioned her aunt as one who had given her the motivation to learn English. She said:

> My parents and my mother's sister often mention the importance of English. I rarely talk with my father but I talk a lot with my mother and aunty. These two people seem to understand me so well. They have always inspired me to put effort into my learning.

In fact, when she discussed how her family had played a part in her learning, Minh tended not to emphasise the role of her parents and seemed to imply a lack of support or guidance from

her parents. However, the above response seems to reflect her acknowledgement of the encouragement from one of her parents - her mother and her aunt. This seemed to have mitigated the effect of a lack of guidance or support from her parents who, as she described previously, had been "very busy" with their business and had "not [paid] much attention [to her]".

In a similar vein, Ngoc referred to her uncle who served as an inspiration for her learning:

> The second source of support is my mother's brother. He is a lecturer of English at a university in [a big] city. He sets a good example for me to follow. He used to be a brilliant student. I want to be like him. Whenever I receive a C grade for a subject, I talk to him about it. Although he might show his disappointment with my result, he makes me feel like I have to try harder to get a higher grade next time.

Lan seemed to have been inspired by her cousin who she described as having "a strong passion for English" and being "very good at English" as she could understand "English-speaking movies without Vietnamese subtitles" while Lan could not. Lan reported that she often came over to her cousin's house to practise speaking English with her. Discussing the resources she had taken advantage of to withstand difficulties, Lan once again confirmed that she had drawn upon "the support of [her] cousin to maintain and make progress in learning English".

The students' responses above indicate their perception of the protective factors from family members. Through interacting with them, the students had been able to capitalise on their support and encouragement to bounce back from difficulties and challenges. Also, the students' accounts included their family members as inspiration for their learning in addition to the support and encouragement from their parents.

The above analysis captures the interwoven relationship between these protective factors and their counterparts. It is worth noting that the number of fourth-year students who reported having sensed the support and encouragement from families is smaller than that of the first-year students. This is likely to indicate the variation of a factor or subsystem within the system of resilience in its operation, or the temporal aspect of the developmental process of resilience in foreign language learning.

6.2.2. Protective factors from institutional aspects of context.

Seven of 13 fourth-year students confirmed having collaborated with their peers in their learning in response to difficulties or challenges while five students reported having sensed

some support from their teachers. One reported having been financially supported by the university.

6.2.2.1. Relationship and collaboration with peers

Fourth-year students tended to share a similar perspective with their juniors on the collaboration with peers as conducive to their language learning in the face of difficulties or challenges. This perspective was reflected in the responses of Rahlan, H'Khuen, Huyen and Thuya, who concurred that they had collaborated with their peers to sustain their English learning . Rahlan stated briefly that "when [he] had difficulties regarding [his] learning, [he] asked for help from peers or teachers". Later in his comment, he re-affirmed his perspective on the role of collaboration with peers as he added: "I mostly interact with my friends regarding learning issues". H'Khuen, Huyen and Thuya elaborated further on how they had collaborated with their peers in learning English when they faced difficulties. H'Khuen recollected a situation as follows:

> I shared the room with one of my classmates in the university dormitory. We used to help each other in learning. For example, if I could not figure out something in English grammar exercises or was not able to make sense of an audio recording in English, I would ask for her suggestions. It was like we formed a study group.

Huyen said that she and her classmates had "used English to text to each other" or "practised speaking English with each other outside the classroom". It was likely that by taking the initiative in collaborating with her classmates, Huyen might have aimed at overcoming the "shyness" she used to suffer when speaking English because of not having been well trained at the lower level of education. Thuya also seemed to have found comfort in cooperating with her peers in learning as she talked about how she had dealt with difficulties and challenges in her learning pathway as follows:

> Most of the time I studied with my friends in a team. We often communicated with each other via the internet when we had group work assignments or had to deal with difficult assignments.

Despite a similar perception of the protective factor from collaborative learning, Tin, Ngoc and Minh's responses seemed a little different from the above in that they had been able to draw on their more capable peers to cope or to motivate themselves. Tin asserted that he had been able

to “learn from his classmates”. Ngoc and Minh both seemed to have been inspired to try harder by establishing relationships with more capable peers, as they respectively commented:

> I made friends with a group of my classmates who are studying quite hard. It was this group of friends that gave me the motivation to study harder so that I could outperform them.

and

> Making friends with outstanding classmates made me feel like making an effort in learning to be at least as good as them. I asked for their suggestions on learning tips and chose the ones that best suit me.

In essence, the students shared a perspective on peer collaboration as a measure to bounce back from the challenges in their learning pathways. It also appeared that in taking advantage of this contextual protective factor, internal protective factors such as initiative, motivation or goal-directedness had also taken shape to counteract the factors detrimental to their learning. The similarity between fourth-year students and their junior peers in respect of peer cooperation or collaboration seems to indicate the importance of this contextual protective factor in the development of foreign language learner resilience in the context of English teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam.

6.2.2.2. Support and inspiration from teachers

Five out of 13 interview students reported having been supported and inspired by their teachers at both secondary and university level of education. This appeared in the responses of five students, H’Nhe, Tin, Thu, Nguyen and An. For example, H’Nhe and Thu reported having sensed the support from their secondary level teachers. Although H’Nhe described her high school English teachers as having been “not enthusiastic in their teaching”, she neutralised this with another comment about them. She said:

> When I was in Grade 9, I was selected to participate in an English contest for talented students. I was able to learn a lot from the teachers who helped me review my knowledge of English. I also was able to practise and make improvements in my English learning thanks to the learning materials that the teachers gave me when I was reviewing for the university entrance examination.

In a similar vein, Thu talked at length about how she had been supported by her secondary level English teachers - two in particular. One of them taught her English in Grade 6 and "used to work as a tourist guide and had a good English pronunciation". Thu recalled:

> The teacher inspired and supported me a lot as he realised that I was interested in learning English. . . . He often encouraged me to use English to communicate with him whenever I met him.

Thu's motivation seemed to have decreased after that as she no longer had the opportunity to study English with her inspirational teacher in Grade 8, but with a "bad-tempered" teacher who she described as having "got angry quite often with the students when [they] made mistakes". However, she regained momentum when her "tourist-guide teacher" returned to teach her. Thu continued her story:

> When I was in Grade 9, the tourist guide teacher returned to teach us. At that time, I felt that I had quite a big gap in my knowledge about English grammar. . . . He helped me to prepare for the entrance examination to the Grade 10 English-specialised class. Within one year, he helped me improve my English language skills and grammar as well. I was successfully admitted to the Grade 10 English-specialised class.

In the English specialised class at high school, Thu seemed to have been overwhelmed by the training programme which "focused on grammar, reading and writing, but not speaking and listening skills". This was when the role of her high school English teacher was brought into play as Thu explained:

> I was very fortunate to be able to learn English with a very good English teacher during my three years at high school. . . . She tried her best to create a favourable condition for us to practise all four skills despite the imbalance [in the time spent on these skills].

Thu also described her high school English teacher as having helped her overcome depression due to pressure from learning. As a student of the English specialised class, she had "had about 15 to 16 periods of English per week at school to prepare for the English contest for talented students", which seemed to have led to her depression. Fortunately, "my English teacher was the first one who talked with me about the situation", Thu recalled. Talking with her English teacher had helped "calm [her] down a lot" and got her "back on a learning track two or three months afterwards".

H'Nhe and Thu's perception of their teachers as resources reflects the counteractive mechanism of the sub-systems within the system of foreign language learner resilience. In particular, the supportive role of the teachers counteracted the risk factors derived from the same context as both students reported having experienced difficulties in learning English at the secondary level while having been able to capitalise upon support from people in this context as well.

Fourth-year students also reported having been inspired by their university teachers, as seen in interviews with Nguyen, An, H'Nhe and Thu. Nguyen stated briefly: "There are people whose achievements inspire us, for example, I am inspired by Ms Hoang [pseudonym] in our university".

Similarly, H'Nhe appeared to have felt support and inspiration from some university teachers as she commented:

> Some of the teachers did inspire me to learn. For example, they shared with us their ideas about prospects such as travelling or studying abroad. Such ideas have given me a lot of motivation. A teacher even showed her concern about my learning and guided me to write in my diary by telling me about how she had written hers which made me feel like writing my own diary in English.

Although both Nguyen's and H'Nha's comments do not particularly indicate any negative situations where the inspiration and support from their university teachers had helped, the comments reflect their perception of a particular protective factor from the institutional context that could contribute to lessening the negative effects of various situations they may have experienced throughout their English learning trajectories.

An and Hien's accounts made comparisons between the teachers they had studied with. For example, An said: "The teachers trained abroad tend to have more interesting classroom activities". Her comparison indicates that despite the drawbacks she had experienced in learning English at the university, as mentioned previously in her comment (see section 6.1.3.2 for details), An had also found inspiration for her learning from the teaching practice of "teachers trained abroad" which was likely to neutralise the negative feelings arising from that of other university teachers.

An talked more about a particularly notable teacher:

> I remember when I studied writing skills with Ms Katherine [pseudonym], she seemed more flexible in giving feedback and marking . . . that made us feel more confident and motivated us to learn.

While the full excerpt was used previously to illustrate her perception of the difficulties and challenges from her interactions in the institutional context, the above quote suggests An's perception of a possible protective factor from this context – teachers' feedback as an inspiration mitigating the risk factors emerging from this context itself.

Thu also talked about how she had been supported by one of her university teachers in particular:

> Ms Mary [pseudonym] recommended a lot of learning resources. She supported us a lot. . . . She appeared to be open in communicating with us. In a presentation, she recommended a list of websites for practising English language skills. I have used 90 out of 100 sites she recommended. Our [Vietnamese] teachers also recommend books to read, but rarely do they suggest websites.

Thu's comment reveals her perception of the teacher's support in terms of introducing learning resources. Her last comment in the excerpt seems to indicate this perspective more clearly as she made a comparison between the teacher with others who were also supportive in terms of recommending learning resources, but online resources.

The students' accounts above indicate their perception of support and inspiration from the teachers at different levels of education. The analysis has served to represent how this contextual protective factor was likely to counteract the probable risk factors emerging in the students' learning pathways. It is also important to note that while most of the first-year students seemed to have capitalised on the support and encouragement from their school teachers, only two of 13 fourth-year students reported receiving support from their high school teachers. Interestingly, while none of the first-year interview students found that they had been inspired or supported by their university teachers, three fourth-year students revealed otherwise. Such information reflects the fluctuation of factors and the dynamism of the system of resilience in English learning at the university in Vietnam

6.2.2.3. Financial support from the university

One student confirmed having received financial support from the university. In particular, Tu, whose family had been "categorised as a poor household by the local government", revealed

that “the university offered a tuition fee waiver” for her studies at the university. Although this appears as a minor case in the data, it suggests that support from a macro level feature in the institutional context is worthy of inclusion as one protective factor that contributes to the development of the students’ resilience in learning.

6.2.3. Protective factors from society/community context

Three fourth-year students revealed their perception of protective factors derived from their interactions with societal aspects of context. They reported having managed to find sources of support from social relationships, including their part-time workmates and close friends from outside the institutional context. Students for whom this was the case include Huyen, Minh and Tu.

Huyen and Minh concurred that they had found support from their part-time workplaces. Describing the resources she had taken advantage of to overcome difficulties, Huyen said:

> I work as a part-time teaching assistant at an English language centre, so I have the environment to use English to communicate with people in the centre. Moreover, people in the centre also support and encourage me in using English.

Similarly, Minh talked about how she had been supported at an English language centre where she was working part-time.

> Working part-time helps reduce my anxiety. I am working as a teaching assistant at an English language centre. The foreign teacher and I often talk before each class session, which is gradually making me feel less anxious in speaking English to foreigners.

The above responses reflect Huyen and Minh’s shared perspective on a resource to draw on from a context different from their families, school or university. While Huyen did not mention how the support and encouragement of the staff in the English centre had helped her, taking the position as a part-time teaching assistant would have helped her overcome the lack of confidence in “communicat[ing] in English” for fear of “not making sense to people”. This counteractive mechanism appears to be reflected more clearly in Minh’s comment as she confirmed that talking with the foreign teacher before each class session had helped reduce her anxiety in speaking English.

As distinct from the two cases above, Tu, another student in this cohort, seemed to have maintained a good relationship with her close friends, yet they were not living close by. Describing resources she had taken advantage of to cope with difficulties, Tu said:

> Some of my close friends who have stopped studying but are working now are living far away from me have been wholeheartedly supporting me. They supported me financially and emotionally as I could borrow money from them and they sometimes encouraged me to sustain my learning.

In fact, what appears dominant in Tu's data was the financial difficulties. One could assume an interaction between her close friends' financial support and encouragement (a contextual protective factor) and the financial difficulty of her family (a contextual risk factor). It is also evident from her comment that the protective factor emerged from the societal aspect of context mediated by her interaction with people outside her family or the circle of friends at the university where she was studying.

As clearly shown in the data, the number of students whose perception of protective factors derived from their interaction with the societal aspect of context is not high (3 out of 13). The numbers of first-year students where this was the case were even fewer (2 out of 17). This observation suggests that there may have been a development of the students' positive attributes of initiative and resourcefulness contributing to the developmental process of resilience. As for Huyen and Minh, they seemed to have taken the initiative to expand their circle of interaction through working part-time, and they displayed their resourcefulness by taking advantage of the new relationships in their workplace to gain confidence in speaking English. Regarding the case of Tu, her response seemed not to show her initiative but it did seem to reflect her resourcefulness as she had been able to maintain a good relationship with her close friends upon which she had been able to capitalise in the face of difficulties. While the analysis shows some differences between fourth-year and first-year students in their perception of the contextual protective factors, it also shows that at both levels, the students' internal protective factors linked with the contextual ones, contributing to the shaping of the complex dynamic system of resilience in foreign language learning. Such an interrelationship will be discussed further in the following sections about the internal protective factors.

6.2.4. ICT as another source of protective factors

A large number of students reported having exploited the internet in multiple ways to facilitate their English learning. This finding aligns with data from interviews with first-year students.

Eleven out of 13 students confirmed having used different internet resources to either search for learning materials or practise and improve their language skills. The internet resources that the students reported having used could be categorised into three types, ranging from the least to the highest frequency of use. These include online courses, social media, and online videos or movies.

Regarding online courses, one fourth-year student, Tin, reported having registered for online courses to improve his English. Tin, who talked at length about his struggle to find time to learn and being troubled by the unexpected prospect having to work in the family business, explained the details of these resources:

> Normally, I get online as a self-study activity. I am now taking an extra course in IELTS with a teacher to learn about strategies for the test and self-study strategies. I also have registered for several self-paced learning online courses. I find self-study is much better than going to classes.

The last sentence indicates Tin's perception of the usefulness of the online courses for his English learning. This statement also suggests that Tin had been able to find a solution to his problem of time constraints - seen as a risk factor in the context of his family.

It is also noticeable that Tin's excerpt appears to reflect the range of his positive personal resources, including his purposefulness, self-awareness, initiative and resourcefulness. To elaborate, Tin appeared to be a goal-directed person when he revealed his expectation to become a teacher. He seemed to be able to evaluate his own situation and identify what he should put effort into in order to reach the goal. Subsequently, Tin's purposefulness and self-awareness seemed to have contributed to his initiative and resourcefulness in learning. All these contextual and internal protective factors seemed to have intermingled, generating a subsystem of protective factors. This subsystem was very likely to sequentially interact with the subsystem of risk factors to form a complex dynamic system of resilience that had helped Tin maintain and make improvement in learning English.

Three students, Tu, Ngoc and Huyen, reported having used social media as a medium to look for materials, learn English grammar or improve their English skills. Tu said that she had "also use[d] the internet, especially Facebook, to search for learning materials" as she asserted that "there are a lot of materials relevant to English learning". Huyen also reported having made the most of the resources on social media such as Facebook or Instagram for her English learning. She commented:

> I feel frustrated with the grammar lessons in class as I have gone through those grammatical points so many times. Instead, I went to Facebook and Instagram pages of foreigners and read the statuses written in English on these social networking pages. In this way, I could learn English grammatical points that I have not come across and learn the way people use English.

Ngoc also described how she had made use of social media to improve her English speaking skill:

> There are actually various ways thanks to the advance in technology. For example, if I cannot practise speaking English with my friends, I make friends on social media to practise speaking with them. In fact, I joined a group of people who are interested in English on Facebook. I made friends with those who shared the same English-speaking need and practise speaking with them daily. It is like "feeding two birds with one scone" as I can practise speaking English while expanding the circle of friends.

Although these three students seemed to have exploited social media differently, they appeared to have used it with the same purpose, that is, to facilitate their learning in response to difficulties and challenges. While Tu had taken advantage of social media to look for learning materials which might have partly lessened her struggle with financial difficulties, Huyen had explored Facebook and Instagram to get rid of the frustration with the repeated classroom grammatical lessons and inspire herself to learn through the discovery of new things about English. Ngoc had managed to find an environment to practise her English speaking from social media, which she considered beneficial in both ways – practising English and making friends. In fact, the students' comments above also reflect the internal factors conducive for their learning as well. In particular, by taking the initiative to look for learning materials, discover new grammatical structures and uses of English by a variety of people, and making use of social media as a platform to practise English speaking, Tu, Huyen and Ngoc demonstrated their initiative and resourcefulness.

A few fourth-year students reported having downloaded learning materials on the internet. This information appears minor in the data as the students did not elaborate much except to confirm that they had downloaded books or learning materials from unspecified websites. Nine out of 13 interview students reported having been able to learn from videos available on the internet. Prevalent in the data were students describing YouTube and Tedtalk as popular websites for

them to learn and improve their language skills. The descriptions from the following students encapsulate the students' perceptions of the benefits of these resources.

Ngoc said that as she was "preparing for the IELTS test", she "watched videos on Youtube and Ted talks" to practise her English listening. Similarly, Minh also reported:

> To practise English listening skill, I downloaded the Ted talks application. I listen to one talk every morning. At first, it was quite difficult to understand what people said in the videos, but I then was able to understand after listening to them many times. I make it one of my routines. I listen to the videos then read the script to check if I get them right or not.

Ngoc and Minh's descriptions indicate their shared perspective on the usefulness of YouTube and Ted talks videos which provided them with an authentic environment to practise their English listening. These ICT tools seemed beneficial to moderate the deficiency in this skill that they believed had not been well developed at the lower level of education as described earlier in their discussion about challenges and difficulties.

Sharing a little different perspective on the benefits of YouTube videos, H'Khuen, describing the resources she had used to sustain her learning, commented as follows:

> In addition to my friends' support and my efforts, I often watch YouTube videos to get inspired. Most of these videos have either Vietnamese or English subtitles. Watching these videos not only allows me to learn English but motivates me as well.

Driven by a passion for English learning, H'Nhe appeared resourceful in making use of YouTube videos. H'Nhe stated:

> Actually, I could overcome the difficulties because I've enjoyed learning it. For example, instead of communicating with friends, I watch YouTube videos to practise listening and imitate the speech of the people in the videos. Otherwise, I can converse with myself about a topic related to a YouTube video I have watched. In general, I have been taking advantage of YouTube to learn English a lot.

The student cases above indicate fourth-year students' recognition of the benefit of this kind of internet resource for their English learning. The students' descriptions serve as evidence for the interaction between one type of online resource as a protective factor and the risk factor - the lack of an environment for authentic communication in English.

In summary, fourth-year students' perception of protective factors from ICT appears to be in line with those of first-year students. Findings from both data sets indicated that a large number of students reported that they made use of the ICT tools as an affordance of their language learning in response to difficulties and challenges. Although students from both cohorts exploited a variety of ICT tools, students from both year groups seemed to share a similar perspective on the benefit of online videos and social media as they both considered these channels as environments for authentic English language practice. This reflects the counteractive mechanism between protective and risk factors in that despite a lack of an environment for authentic English practice and communication, the students utilised the online videos and social media as protective factors as affordances to mitigate the difficulty. Fourth-year students tended to make more use of internet resources to improve their skills at a more macro level such as listening and speaking whereas some first-year students tended to use the ICT tools such as mobile applications for their micro language skills and knowledge such as vocabulary or pronunciation. In other words, the students' perception of difficulties and challenges in learning English might vary at different points in time, hence their perception of factors beneficial for their learning might also vary.

6.2.5. Internal resources as internal protective factors

It would seem useful to reiterate the rationale for the separate presentation of internal and contextual factors – that it is intended to bring to the fore the components and emphasise the interaction between risk and protective factors seen as the principal interactive mechanism of the system of foreign language learner resilience. This section, therefore, presents the internally driven protective factors having played a part in supporting the students' learning in the face of difficulties and challenges. Data indicated fourth-year students had displayed *purposefulness, resourcefulness, initiative, self-awareness, optimism* and *perseverance* in overcoming difficulties and challenges in their English learning pathways. Although these attributes are similar to those of their junior peers as detected in the data from first-year students, differences have also been detected in the prevalence of some.

6.2.5.1. Purposefulness

Describing their motives in the course of overcoming difficulties and challenges, many of the interview students concurred that they had managed to sustain their English learning despite difficulties by making investments into their future desired employment. Minh, for example, confirmed that her efforts put into learning English had been guided by her expected prospect.

She stated: “I am thinking about my future employment which should be something related to English. I have not got a clear idea yet, but I have to try hard from now.” Minh seemed to have a clearer view about her future job when she stated: “My family wanted me to be a teacher, but I want to work in the translation industry. I would like to be an interpreter”. Minh’s response indicates her purposefulness as she seemed to have taken her “future employment” as an objective to “try hard from now”. That Minh had made investments into her desired career as an interpreter illustrated her purposefulness which counteracted the risk factors she had encountered in her learning pathway.

Tin’s case seemed to illustrate the interaction between his purposefulness as an internal protective factor and the factors detrimental to his learning. Tin asserted: “I want to have a good result which will help me find a job”. His expectation to find a job was reflected more clearly when he talked about what had driven him to sustain and make improvements in his learning:

> So far the effort I have put into learning English originated from my expectation to have an English-related job such as English language teacher. . . . Generally, it’s all about employment. I don’t want to work in my family business as my brother is doing.

The above excerpt indicates Tin’s purposefulness to sustain and make an effort in his English learning by his expectation of employment. Indeed, setting the goal to find a job as an English language teacher and putting effort into reaching that goal could be seen as the internal force that helped Tin overcome his worry at being forced to work in his family business (See section 6.1.2.3).

A similar perspective also appears in Tu’s description of her motives to overcome difficulties:

> My strongest motive is to have a good command of English to find an English-related job. I chose to study this major at this university because of my family circumstances. I assume that studying English will help me find a better job. I just study to find a stable job, which will help me be less dependent on my family. As I think, if I try a little harder, I will be able to help my mother and my family.

Tu’s purposefulness seemed to have derived from her wish to help her mother and family. Indeed, a look back at Tu’s learning trajectory revealed that Tu had been suffering from financial difficulties throughout her learning pathway. Tu’s purposefulness had helped sustain her learning in response to her family’s financial difficulties. This represents the reciprocal

interaction between protective and risk factors leading to the development of her resilience in English learning.

Regarding the students' purposefulness displayed through their expectation of travelling or studying abroad, eight fourth-year students reported having been inspired to learn English by nurturing the hope to travel or study abroad. This can be illustrated by the responses of H'Nhe, Thuya, Minh, Rahlan, and Thu. While H'Nhe, Thuya, and Minh concurred that they had always dreamed of travelling abroad, Rahlan and Thu shared that they had been inspired by the idea of studying abroad. For example, H'Nha stated that her "burning desire [was] going abroad". She asserted: "I like the United States of America. I think this is the only thing that inspires me to learn English". In a similar vein, Thuya and Minh showed their determination in their respective responses about their desires in the course of overcoming challenges as follows:

> The biggest motivation for me to sustain my learning is travelling abroad. It has long been my dream since I was a little girl.

and

> I want to travel abroad as I think, communicating in English with the local people who speak English will be more interesting than relying on a tourist guide.

Rahlan and Thu both confirmed that their English learning had been driven by the hope to study abroad. For example, Rahlan said that he had "dreamed of studying abroad since he started university". Hence, he believed that "English is a must to study abroad". Similarly, Thu asserted that she had "chosen to study English firstly because of [her] passion for it", but her "desire to study abroad started to grow" afterwards.

The above descriptions of the students' motivation indicate their purposefulness in making an effort in their English learning despite difficulties or challenges. Despite differences in their expressed goals, they tended to have one thing in common. That is, they all seemed to have invested in "imagined [English speaking] communities" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 78). Such emotional investments may have guided them to set goals, which subsequently helped them put effort into learning the language.

Two fourth-year students commented that they were inspired by their role models. Ngoc asserted having been inspired by her uncle:

> The second source of support is my mother's brother. He is a lecturer of English at a university in HCM city. He sets a good example for me to follow. He was a brilliant student. I want to be like him.

While the excerpt, for the most part, appears to reflect Ngoc's perception of a protective factor from her family, the last statement indicates Ngoc's purposefulness in putting effort into learning English to become someone like her uncle.

In a similar vein, Thu seemed to have taken her brother as a role model who had inspired her to sustain and make improvements in learning English despite difficulties as she stated: "My brother has been the biggest inspiration to me." In fact, Thu had invested emotionally in learning English and had admired her brother long before she became a university student. Thu recalled:

> My brother was a very good student who participated in contests at both district and provincial levels. I remember when I was in Grade 4 or 5, I saw him conversing with two Swedes. He was a Grade 9 student at that time. As I was watching him, I admired him a lot. From then on my motivation to learn English was triggered.

The above excerpt indicates Thu's perception of a protective factor derived from her interaction with a family member. However, the statement about her brother seems to reinforce the perspective that Thu had made investments in her desired identity (to be like her brother) and had become goal-directed in learning English. Such goal-directedness was likely to have boosted her motivation in English learning and guided her to navigate her learning in the face of difficulties.

In summary, the above analyses of student cases have supported the claim about fourth-year students' display of their purposefulness in maintaining their English learning in the presence of challenges. Findings related to this internal resource as displayed by fourth-year students are in line with those in the data from first-year student interviews in that all students from both year cohorts appeared to have demonstrated their purposefulness. Many of the students from both year cohorts tended to have been driven to surpass their difficulties and challenges by similar goals such as employment and going or studying abroad. In addition, two fourth-year students seemed to have made investments in their desired identities, which subsequently had guided them to put efforts into learning English irrespective of difficulties and challenges.

6.2.5.2. Initiative and resourcefulness

Interviews with fourth-year students revealed prevalent information regarding the students' display of initiative and resourcefulness. As explained in chapter 5, the students who displayed initiative tended to have proactively taken action in finding solutions to impediments or showed themselves to be autonomous in learning. Those categorised as resourceful appeared to have taken advantage of the available resources to navigate and maintain their learning despite difficulties and challenges. Also, as seen with first-year students, although initiative and resourcefulness are different attributes, the data used to argue for these two attributes can overlap; sometimes one behaviour could also reflect both attributes.

Regarding initiative, eleven fourth-year students displayed this internal resource. The analysis below focuses on two students, Ngoc and Thu, whose responses encapsulate other students' perspectives.

In describing her feelings in the course of overcoming difficulties in English learning, Ngoc commented:

> As I said earlier, I find that English is important for my future, so I take my learning seriously. Hence, whenever I encounter problems, I manage to find solutions to them myself. I never think of giving up when not having a favourable environment to learn. Instead, I think positively. If I don't have the environment, then I create my own environment to practise my speaking skill.

Thus, Ngoc had taken the initiative to create her own environment to practise English speaking by making use of social media. She elaborated:

> If I cannot practise speaking English with my friends, I make friends on social media to practise speaking with them. . . . I joined a group of people who are interested in English on Facebook. I made friends with those who shared the same English-speaking need and practise speaking with them daily.

The excerpts above reflect Ngoc's ability to take action proactively and take charge of her own learning as well. Indeed, Ngoc had taken the initiative to find a solution to the lack of an environment to practise speaking English. Ngoc's statement: "If I don't have the environment, then I create my own environment to practise my speaking skill" indicated her agency, which triggered her use of social media to overcome this limitation. This reflects the interaction between her initiative as an internal protective factor and the contextual risk factor of a lack of

opportunities in the environment to practise speaking English, contributing to the process of her resilience in learning English.

Thu also displayed initiative and a similar counteractive mechanism between this internal resource and the contextual difficulties in her learning pathway. She said:

> About speaking English, except for the class time when they are required to use English, my peers seem afraid of speaking English. Despite studying the same major, when I use English to speak to them, they refuse to talk back to me in English. Instead, they say things like, "Let's speak Vietnamese. It's not class time now". So, I have to practise speaking on my own at home.

Her initiative was shown more clearly when she elaborated on what she had done to overcome these difficulties:

> As for speaking skills, although I had few opportunities to communicate with foreigners, I practise speaking English to myself in front of the mirror or murmuring to myself in English, just the same as what some of my peers often do. Sometimes, I murmur my routines on the way home after school. Then, I practise singing English songs. I sometimes have difficulties pronouncing English sound sequences in the songs but I still try my best. I also read storybooks in English. If I have difficulties pronouncing some words, I look up in the dictionary for the pronunciation. All of these have become my habits.

Thu's elaboration above indicates her proactive actions in finding solutions to the lack of an environment for language practice. This echoes the counteractive mechanism between her initiative as an internal protective factor and the above-mentioned risk factors.

In fact, the above two cases can also illustrate the fourth-year students' display of resourcefulness as both Ngoc and Thu had been able to make use of the available resources to sustain their learning in response to the lack of an environment for practising English.

The analysis on the internal resources of the two students above also revealed the interaction between the students' internal protective factors – initiative and resourcefulness as it seemed one factor affected the formation of another. In particular, Ngoc's initiative to find the solution to the lack of an English-speaking environment had guided her to become resourceful in exploiting social media as a platform to practise English. Similarly, Thu's proactive actions had catalysed her resourcefulness in finding solutions relevant to her learning problems.

As dominant internal factors in the data, initiative and resourcefulness can also be found in other fourth-year students' responses; those of Minh and Lan seemed most evident. These two internal resources were reflected in Lan's description of how she had overcome obstacles in her language learning:

> I searched for the links for learning materials and tips shared on Facebook pages of my senior peers who had scored highly in IELTS tests and chose the ones suitable for me.
>
> I often spend time studying at home from 8 to 9 pm. I prefer learning at home to studying in the classroom. For listening, at first, I was not able to make sense of the audio recordings, so I looked at the tips for listening skill. I also used the shadowing technique to mimic the voices of interlocutors in the recordings. Actually, it was very difficult to imitate, but I tried. I practised my writing skill by writing my diary in English. When I had difficulties in writing, I looked for phrases in the IELTS materials and used them in my writing.

The above excerpt reflects Lan's initiative and resourcefulness as she showed herself to be autonomous in her English learning, which had subsequently helped her identify resources to take advantage of to overcome difficulties of limited environment or learning resources. Her actions represent layers of interactions contributing to the development of her resilience in English learning. These include the macro level of interaction between protective and risk factors and the micro level of interaction among protective factors.

In a similar vein, Minh shared a description of her behaviours:

> There is not an environment. Actually, there were very few opportunities for us to use the language, yet I managed to find one by participating in an English speaking club. Initially, I did feel anxious about speaking English, but then I realised that not all members of the club were good at English. They were at different levels of proficiency, which made me feel more comfortable and get motivated to make an effort. I realised that it is important for us to speak first because when we speak we feel more confident in using English to express our thinking. It will then help us refine other skills.

Minh's description indicates her initiative and resourcefulness in finding an environment for practising her English speaking skill, which subsequently built her confidence. Her initiative was reflected in her proactive search for opportunities to speak English. Minh's action served her well in finding an English-speaking club. Her initiative and resourcefulness helped her find

the resolution to her anxiety in speaking English. In short, Minh's initiative and resourcefulness had helped her overcome a contextual difficulty and her negative feeling as well. Again, Minh's account reflects the complexity of the interactions of factors in response to difficulties and challenges in learning English.

More evidence for Minh's resourcefulness and the interaction between factors can also be found as she continued her description:

> Working part-time helps reduce my anxiety. I am working as a teaching assistant at an English language centre. The foreign teacher and I often talk before each class session, which is gradually making me feel less anxious in speaking English to foreigners.

This excerpt provides evidence for Minh's perception of support from her interaction with the societal context. However, it can also serve as an illustration for her resourcefulness as Minh had been able to capitalise upon the support from her social interaction in an environment outside the institutional context.

Minh's resourcefulness also appeared in her recount of interaction with her more capable peers. Continuing the above description, Minh said:

> Making friends with outstanding classmates made me feel like making an effort in learning to be at least as good as them. I asked for their suggestions on learning tips and chose the ones that best suit me.

Although this excerpt was used as an illustration of her perception of support from her peers. the evidence for Minh's resourcefulness lies in the fact that she had been able to make friends with her "outstanding classmates" and draw on their expertise as a way to respond to the challenges confronting her in the process of learning English.

In short, the analyses of the above four student cases have captured two internal resources as displayed by the behaviours of a large number of fourth-year students. The analyses have also attempted to represent the interactive mechanism between these two internal protective factors and their counterparts in each student case.

6.2.5.3. Self-awareness

Self-awareness was found to have been displayed by nine students. The analysis of Tu's and H'Khuen's cases captures this perspective as reflected by other student cases.

Tu seemed to be well aware of the disadvantageous condition of her family as she tended to mention her family several times in the interview. She commented:

> The circumstance of my family can actually be seen as the motivation for my learning. It is like the compensation for my brother's dropping out of school. That is, I study for myself and for my brother as well. My brother dropped out when he was a Grade 10 student. Since then I have been making a lot more effort in my learning.

She added:

> I am trying my best not to rely on my family's [financial] support. My mother is ageing and my younger brother is the only person who is working in the family, so I need to try my best to manage everything by myself here. Things seem difficult sometimes, but I'll get over the difficulties bit by bit as long as I try.

It appears from the above two excerpts that Tu acknowledged the contextual factor confronting her learning – financial difficulties. In fact, her self-awareness seemed to be reflected more clearly when she talked about how she wanted to make up for her brother who had sacrificed his study for her to study. Her self-awareness seemed to have derived from a sense of responsibility for her mother and younger brother. Tu's acknowledgement of this contextual challenge had subsequently become her motivation to move forward in her learning. In other words, Tu's case not only reflects her self-awareness but also represents the relationship between her self-awareness and purposefulness. More specifically, guided by her evaluation of the family's financial condition and acknowledgement of her younger brother's sacrifice, Tu put effort into her learning to help lift the financial burden from the family and to make up for her brother as well.

While Tu's case reflects her self-awareness of familial context difficulties, H'Khuen's case indicates her acknowledgement of her personal weakness and strength as well. Describing the psychological states having limited her learning, H'Khuen seemed to recognise her personal shortcomings as she said: "I am lazy. I often delay doing things or might be distracted by things like the internet or Facebook. In short, I feel like I am a lazy person". However, it seemed as if H'Khuen had been able to adjust and make progress:

> I am not sure, but I feel like my English has improved a lot. In the first days at the university, my English knowledge and skills were limited, but it seems I have made progress for over a year. Now I can communicate with foreigners. In the early days, I

found English skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing were really difficult because at that time I had a limited repertoire of English vocabulary.

H'Khuen's response above indicates her capacity to self-evaluate personal weaknesses, including her lack of concentration and low English skills. In addition, H'Khuen was able to recognise her improvements in English suggesting an awareness of her strengths. Such improvements would not have been possible if she had not been able to self-identify her personal drawbacks in order to adjust her behaviour. H'Khuen's self-awareness may also have been fuelled by her purposefulness as she reported having chosen to study this major because she "like[s] learning English" and "expect[s] to work as an English language teacher, interpreter, tourist guide or the like".

The above analysis has also revealed the complexity of the interactive mechanism among factors, including the interaction between the internal protective factors – self-awareness and purposefulness and the interaction between risk and protective factors – core in the development of H'Khuen's complex dynamic system of resilience in English learning.

Although further evidence can be found in the data, the analysis of these two student cases can serve as typical examples of self-awareness as displayed by fourth-year students.

6.2.5.4. Perseverance and optimism

Perseverance was demonstrated by students who appeared to have focused unwaveringly on the accomplishment of their goals while optimistic students are those who had been able to think positively in the face of difficulties and challenges. Like the interviews with first-year students, the interviews with fourth-year students also revealed these two internal protective factors as the least dominant themes. Three students appeared to have displayed perseverance while five students were found to have shown optimism. Some fourth-year students seemed to have shown both perseverance and optimism in the accounts of behaviour in the face of difficulties and challenges.

Regarding perseverance, three fourth-year students, Tu, Thu and Lan appeared to have demonstrated this internal resource. Tu's perseverance was reflected in the statement: "Things seem difficult sometimes, but I'll get over the difficulties bit by bit as long as I try". Indeed, one would not persevere in doing something without a commitment to a goal. Therefore, it would not be convincing to argue for Tu's perseverance on the basis of the above statement only because it does not show her expectation or a specific goal. In fact, Tu's perseverance

seemed unable to be detached from her purposefulness reflected in her expectation to find a job and share the financial burden for her family as presented in the above section. In fact, the above statement also reflects Tu's optimism as she seemed to have believed that she would overcome difficulties as long as she tried. These two internal protective factors seemed to have a reciprocal relationship contributing to the development of Tu's foreign language learner resilience.

Lan and Thu's comments seem to indicate their perseverance more clearly as they respectively said:

> I would feel irritated if I could not do something thoroughly. I should be able to make it. I want to have a stable job; I want to be a teacher

and

> I would feel dissatisfied if I could not achieve something I aim to achieve. It feels like I have not pushed myself to the limit. For example, even though I have completed the assignment in the textbook, I still think to myself that it is not enough; I have to do more. I should be better.

As for Lan, she asserted wanting to have "a stable job", specifically to become a teacher. Driven by this goal, she seemed to have put effort into her learning despite difficulties. Her perseverance was reflected when she said: "I would feel irritated if I could not do something thoroughly".

Unlike Lan, Thu did not reveal her specific goal in her comment. However, as aforementioned in the section about purposefulness (6.2.5.1), Thu appeared to invest emotionally in her learning as she expressed her wish to study abroad and reported having taken her brother as a role model. As a result, Thu's expectation to "[push herself]to the limit", "do more" "be better" despite challenges in learning English as mentioned earlier in sections about risk factors seems to reflect her perseverance

The analyses of the three student cases above have unveiled their perseverance as an internal protective factor. This internal resource seemed more evident when analysing the students' comments above in relation to the analysis of their risk factors and the internal protective factor of purposefulness. The analysis, thus, also represents the multiple interactions among factors, including protective and risk, internal and contextual, and even between internal ones as well.

Five students, including the above three, were identified to have displayed optimism. Ngoc, for instance, said: "Whenever I encounter problems, . . . I do not have thinking like, "OK. Forget about it". . . . Instead, I think positively."

This excerpt illustrates Ngoc's optimism in that she had shown to have a belief in her capacity to change the difficult situation into an easy one for her learning. In particular, as discussed earlier, Ngoc seemed to believe that she would be able to practise her speaking skill by generating her own environment to practise it. In fact, Ngoc reported that she had been able to join a group on social media to practise speaking English. Ngoc's optimism seemed to have driven her to take the initiative in finding the solution for her learning problem. Her positive thinking is also reflected in her comment at the end of the interview. When asked to identify herself as a typical or atypical foreign language learner, Ngoc said: "I believe that optimism will predominate over everything. I think I can overcome the difficulties easily with it"

As mentioned above in the analysis of her perseverance, Tu's statement: "Things seem difficult sometimes, but I'll get over the difficulties bit by bit as long as I try" also reflects her optimism. This can be further supported by the description of her feelings in the course of overcoming difficulties and challenges as follows:

> I just think that I need to make an effort. All difficulties will pass as long as I try. I feel like I was lucky as I could overcome my difficulties. I also find that I have not tried my best.

In the above extract, Tu seemed to be reflecting on what she had been able to overcome so far, leading to her conclusion that she had been "lucky" in the presence of difficulties. Her optimism seemed to be confirmed again when she said: "All difficulties will pass as long as I try". It is also noticeable that Tu's reflection on the achievement as a result of her perseverance and optimism seemed to help her step back to see how far she had progressed toward her set goal. She seemed to have a sense of self-criticism which could leverage her motivation to try harder. This is reflected in the statement: "I also find that I have not tried my best."

Thu's optimism was detected in her response when asked to identify herself as a typical or atypical foreign language learner:

> What makes me a typical learner is that I have a passion for English. Although I encountered difficulties and even thought about giving up sometimes, I tried my best to change myself with probably a little encouragement. For others, they might think right

> at the beginning that they will not be able to learn the language and they become frustrated with learning and subsequently quit easily. For example, I used to collaborate in learning with a few friends, but whenever we turned to English, they showed negative feelings about it. As a consequence, they were unsuccessful in learning it.

In the first half of her comment, Thu seemed to claim that optimism characterised her as a typical English learner even though her optimism seemed to have been triggered by "a little encouragement". However, her optimism seemed to be reflected more clearly when she contrasted herself with others. Despite having encountered difficulties, she had been able to keep up and try her best in contrast to her friends who "were unsuccessful in learning it".

6.2.6. Summary of fourth-year students' perceptions of protective factors

Findings from fourth-year student interviews are in line with those from first-year students in terms of the perception of the contextual protective factors and the students' display of internal protective factors in response to difficulties and challenges. Additionally, the analysis has depicted the interactive mechanism between protective and risk factors as it appeared from the students' responses to the interview questions. Some student cases have been highlighted to uncover the reciprocal relationship between contextual and internal factors and between the internal factors, which represents the complexity of the interactions within the complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience.

In summary, the analysis of the interview data revealed both similarities and differences between fourth-year students and their junior peers. Regarding the similarities, both groups of students shared the same perspectives on contextual factors having supported their English learning. Also, findings related to fourth-year students' display of internal resources conducive to their English learning in the face of difficulties and challenges are consistent with those detected in first-year student interview data. This reinforces the findings from first-year students and contributes to the inventory of the possible protective factors.

6.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented findings from interviews with fourth-year students. The findings indicate fourth-year students' perspective on factors, either compromising or enabling their English learning. In general, fourth-year students tended to share similar perspectives on both risk and protective factors with their junior peers. In terms of risk factors, findings reveal fourth-year students' perceptions of risks derived from their interactions with contextual aspects

in their families, at schools or the university, and in the society where they lived. Regarding protective factors, interview data indicates the students' perceptions of the support and encouragement from the above-mentioned aspects of context, and resources from ICT. In addition to the resources from the environment, they displayed internal resources in response to the challenges and difficulties. Data analysis also revealed that fourth-year students' perceptions of protective factors appear relatively consistent with those of their junior peers. The analysis of the findings has also exposed the multiple layers of interactions, including those between risk and protective factors and those within each group of factors. These interactions are seen as the dynamic developmental process of the students' resilience in learning English.

Regardless of the consistency in major findings from interviews with two cohorts of students, some minor discrepancies were also detected regarding the risk factors. While first-year students tended to see limited/delayed learning opportunities or lack of an engaging learning environment as risks emerging from the societal aspects of their hometowns, fourth-year students found their language learning more vulnerable to the lack of an environment for authentic English. Regarding risk factors from the familial aspect of context, the lack of familial support/encouragement/guidance in English learning emerged as a perspective that distinguished the fourth-year students' perception from that of their first-year peers. Besides the similarities, a lack of collaboration in learning, the teachers' discouraging way of giving feedback, the pressure from testing and assessment (in high school), the large class sizes, and the lack of an environment for language practice (at university level) are among the different perspectives on risks from institutional aspects of context that distance fourth-year students from their junior peers.

While the similar findings from fourth-year students reinforce those from first-year students, the differences in the findings add to the inventory of factors. This not only contributes to the conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience but also highlights the complexity of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

This study aims to conceptualise foreign language learner resilience (FLLR) in the context of English teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam. It sees FLLR as a complex dynamic system composed of intertwined subsystems of risk factors and protective factors which respectively compromise and enable the process of foreign language learning. The study employed a sequential two-phase qualitative research design to address the overarching research question: *What does resilience look like in foreign language learning?*

This chapter provides a discussion of the key findings in relation to the literature and previous studies on resilience in second language acquisition. The first and briefer section summarises the key findings from the two phases of data collection. The second section more fully discusses the interplay between the contextual and individual factors perceived as having impeded the students' English learning process and those having enabled the students to withstand or overcome challenges. As it would be almost impossible to discuss the interplay between contextual and individual factors without taking into account the temporal and nonlinear aspects of the interactions in the system, the discussion on the temporality and nonlinearity of the interactions contributing to the development of the complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience will also be included in the section. This chapter will show how understanding this interplay has been enabled by adopting DST as a theoretical framework.

7.1. Overview of the research

7.1.1. Phase 1 – Teachers' perspectives on FLLR

Three focus group interviews with teachers were conducted to address the first research sub-question: *What do resilient EFL learners look like?* Eight types of resilient language learners, who can be seen as the manifestation of outcomes or variations of FLLR system in action, were identified from the data. These outcomes were labelled *determined, passion-driven, low self-esteem, failure resistant, encouragement triggered, encouragement and assessment triggered,* and *agentive* either based on the features salient in the participants' descriptions of the learners or using the participants' verbatim quotes.

Common in the data was evidence of that the process of resilience in each learner type was assumed to have been triggered by a contextual difficulty or negative emotion or psychological state derived from the context. The teachers' assumptions about contextual difficulties or challenges centred around the socio-economic conditions of the learners' society/community,

educational backgrounds or learning environment, and their family background. The learners' negative emotions or psychological states such as shyness, sadness, anxiety or low self-esteem were assumed as having derived from the above mentioned contextual factors. Furthermore, the teachers believed that the learners had managed to overcome the difficulties and challenges and become successful learners drawing on the support and encouragement from the teachers or their peers, and/or the learners' dispositional attributes such as purposefulness, initiative or resourcefulness.

Findings from the teachers' data revealed their perceptions of foreign language learner resilience as a dynamic process of interaction between contextual and individual factors sequentially tied to each other.

Although findings from the teachers have revealed their perceptions of factors involved in shaping eight patterns of the FLLR system and to some extent their interrelationship, the teachers' assumptions of the learners' challenges and difficulties and resources seemed limited to their personal interpretations based on their observations. For example, the teachers tended to speculate on the learners' contextual difficulties and challenges drawing on their interpretation of the learners' behaviours in the classrooms while the learners might have faced more challenges and difficulties; or more details about the impacts of the challenges and difficulties on the learners' learning trajectories could have been discovered if they had been described by the learners. Furthermore, although the sequential relationship between contextual risk factors and internal ones was detected in some learner-type cases, the teachers' data reveals less information about their perceptions of the learners' internal factors emerging from contextual challenges and difficulties and the complexity of the interactions compared to that of the students. Similarly, the teachers' perceptions of the contextual resources were confined to the institutional aspects of context. As with the internal risk factors, the teachers tended to describe the learners' internal protective factors sequentially tied with the contextual factors. However, their descriptions revealed little about the complexity of the interactions as they seemed to cover only the counteractive mechanism between the internal protective factors and the risk factors. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the data from the teachers helped identify a number of possible outcomes of the system and provide the basis for developing the data collection tool in the next stage of the research to tease out the system's components.

In essence, despite providing an overview of FLLR and serving as the basis for further exploring the concept of FLLR, the teachers' data could not do justice to the conceptualisation of FLLR as it was unable to fully capture the complexity of the interactions of the factors. This was

because the teachers were describing the learners who they believed had been able to overcome challenges and succeed in learning English. They actually could only see part of the learners' learning trajectories, hence the complexity of the factors. In other words, the data about typical resilient learners would have been more informative if the teacher participants described their own English learning trajectories.

7.1.2. Phase 2 – Students' perspectives on FLLR

Building on findings from the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with 30 EFL students from two year groups to tease out the factors involved in the developmental process of resilience. The students' recounted data about their learning trajectories also addressed the remaining three sub-questions:

- *What factors do Vietnamese tertiary students perceive as limiting their English learning?*

- *What factors do they perceive as enabling their English learning?*

- *What responses do they report making to the challenges and difficulties?*

Data from interviews with two cohorts of students indicate that foreign language learner resilience is shaped by the counteractive mechanism between two groups of factors – risk and protective factors – which has been extensively documented in the theoretical literature on resilience. Embedded in this mechanism are multiple interactions of contextual and individual factors emerging from the learners' interactions with aspects of community, institutional and familial contexts, and it is these interactions that perhaps are not so well documented and accounted for in research on resilience.

7.1.2.1. Contextual and individual factors perceived as risks

Both first-year and fourth-year students shared similar perspectives on risk factors having limited their learning process. These include the difficulties and challenges emerging from the students' interactions with a range of contextual aspects in their hometowns, families and institutions, namely in school and university.

Regarding the risk factors from their hometowns, students from both cohorts concurred in attributing the disadvantageous socio-economic and geographical conditions of their hometowns to their delayed or limited English learning opportunity and the lack of an environment for authentic English practice. These difficulties inevitably demotivated them in learning English.

The students reported having been influenced by various issues from their families, ranging from the bereavement of a family member, parental divorces, family dysfunction to difficult financial conditions. Some fourth-year students reported having sensed a lack of support and encouragement from their families. In the face of the difficulties and challenges from their families, the students confirmed having experienced an array of negative emotions, including sadness and frustration that impeded their English learning.

Referring to the risk factors from the institutional context, the students reported having experienced a lack of motivation or self-efficacy and anxiety originating from their interactions with their teachers and peers at different levels of education. Other institutional aspects such as learning resources or facilities and testing and assessment were also described as having limited the students' learning or demotivated them.

In addition to the similarities, some minor differences between the two student groups were also detected in their perspectives of the risk factors. For example, regarding the difficulties or challenges derived from the community aspect of context, fourth-year students tended to emphasise the lack of an authentic environment for English language practice while first-year students focused on the limited or delayed learning opportunity. In terms of their perceptions of difficulties emerging from their families, while most first-year students described family issues as having negatively influenced their learning, their senior peers also reported having experienced a lack of support and encouragement from their families. Regarding difficulties from the institutional aspect of context, lack of peer collaboration, teachers' discouraging ways of giving feedback, or large class sizes were some noticeable perspectives held by a few fourth-year students that varied from their junior peers.

Thus far the summary of results highlighting similarities and differences between first and fourth-year students' perceptions of risk factors does not offer new insights beyond what we have learned about the particular students in this context. However, if we look at what we have learned about the interaction of these factors, we come to new understandings of the concept of resilience.

Figure 7.1 below represents the students' perceptions of the risk factors. It illustrates the interrelationship between the contextual and individual factors confronting them in their English learning process. In particular, the inner circle represents the students' internal risk factors while the outer illustrates the challenges and difficulties emerging from the students' interactions with institutional, familial and community aspects of context during their English

learning. Although the two circles in the diagram appear static (as represented in text form), the inner circle actually functions as a dial that turns around so that different factors are aligned at different times. Conceiving the diagram as having moving parts allows us to see the variation of the interactions between the contextual and internal risk factors. As revealed from the data, the students' internal risk factors varied in association with their experiences of various contextual challenges and difficulties. For example, in some students' accounts, their negative emotions were found to have originated from their interactions with either familial or institutional aspects of context or both. In other cases, the students' demotivation in learning English was detected in their descriptions of their difficulties and challenges derived from their interactions with institutional or community aspects of context. A similar interactive mechanism was detected as having taken place between the students' lack of self-efficacy and particular aspects of context. The variation of the interaction between the internal and contextual factors, therefore, forms the dynamic subsystem of risk factors within the system of FLLR in the state of flux.

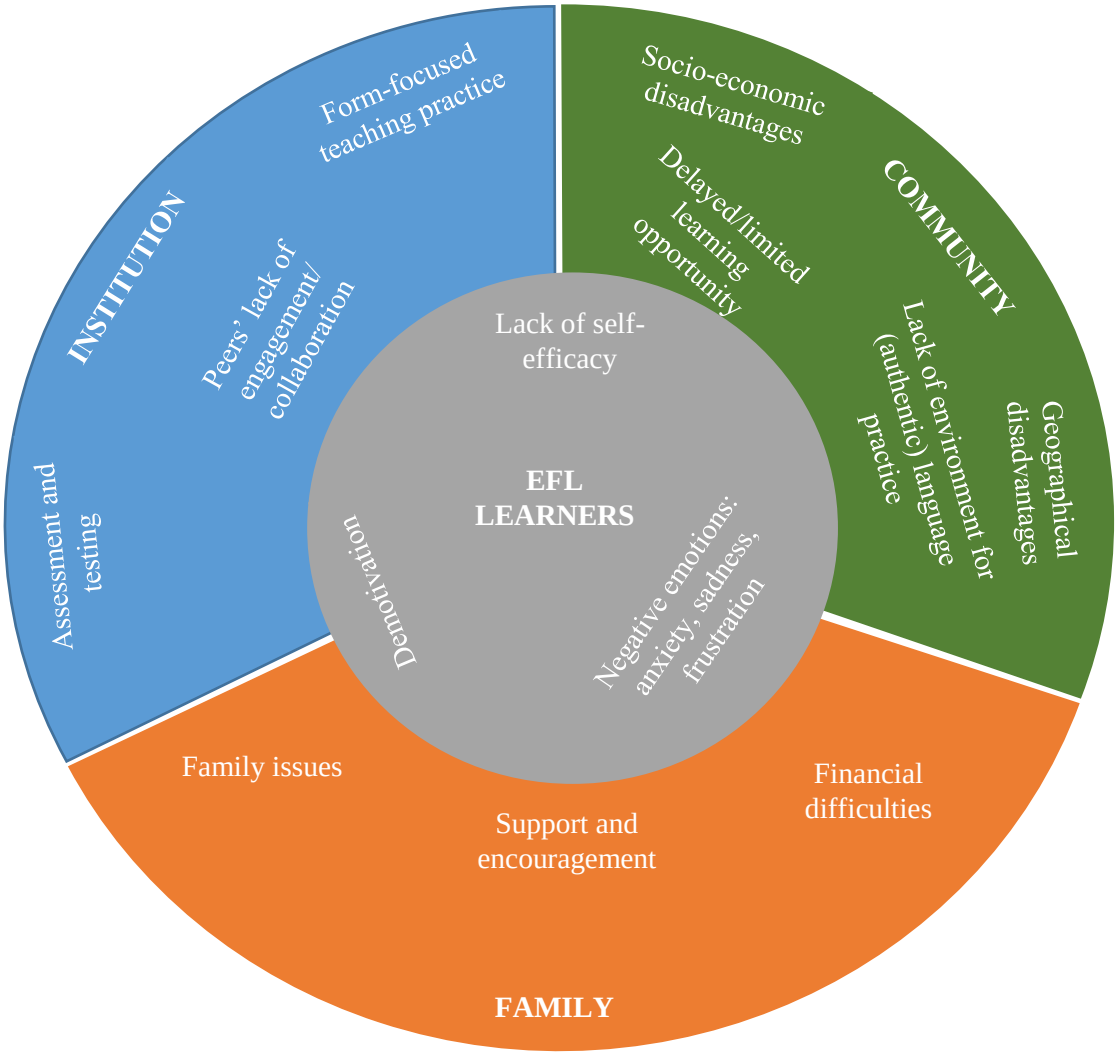

Figure 7.1: Students' perceptions of risk factors

7.1.2.2. Contextual and internal resources as protective factors

Students from both year groups appeared relatively consistent in their descriptions of contextual resources they had capitalised on to withstand difficulties or overcome challenges. In addition to the resources from traditional environments such as the community/society, families and institutions, the students had made use of resources from information and communication technology (ICT) seen as a virtual environment to sustain or make progress in learning English in the face of difficulties and challenges.

Regarding the protective factors from the family aspect of context, data from both student groups indicate the students' perceptions of support, encouragement or inspiration from parents or particular family member. These contextual resources were sensed by more first-year students than their senior peers. It can be speculated that fourth-year students were more familiar with the learning environment at the university than their juniors. As they became more confident, their agency might also have developed. Therefore, fourth-year students might have taken more initiative to find other resources.

In terms of the protective factors from institutional aspects of context, data from both groups of students indicate that peer collaboration and support and encouragement from school teachers were described as one of the resources for the students to draw on. However, while first-year students only reported having drawn on support and encouragement from their school teachers when facing difficulties, fourth-year students found themselves supported and inspired by university teachers as well. Macro-level support was also included as an institutional protective factor as one fourth-year student reported having received a tuition fee waiver from the university, which also mitigated her financial difficulties.

Interview data from both groups of students reveal little about the students' perceptions of protective factors from the society/community context that seemed to mitigate the difficulties they encountered in their learning. A small number from both cohorts had taken the initiative to find affordances for their learning through their social interactions such as taking part in an English club, drawing on the expertise of a particular person they had known in the community, maintaining relationships with old friends or interacting with staff at their part-time workplaces.

The students' perceptions of protective factors expand to the virtual environment where a wide range of the ICT tools such as social networking platforms, video streaming websites or mobile self-paced learning applications had been used by both groups of students to afford their learning in the face of difficulties and challenges.

The exploration of risk factors generated a range of individual factors as seen above in Figure 7.1. Likewise, the exploration of protective factors also generated a range of individual internal resources which begin to look very much like a core in the dynamic system of resilience. These include purposefulness, initiative, resourcefulness, self-awareness, perseverance and optimism. As with the risk factors, what is most insightful is our understanding of the complex interactions between these and contextual factors. In fact, the interactions of protective factors seem more complex than they appear in the students' perceptions of the risk factors as protective factors not only interact between themselves but also with risk factors to mitigate the negative influences on learning.

Prevalent in the students' accounts was the manifestation of purposefulness, initiative, resourcefulness and self-awareness. These individual internal resources were found to be intertwined with each other and with the contextual factors derived from their interactions with various aspects of context. For example, in response to challenges or difficulties from their families, some students showed a sense of purpose, reflected in their expectation for employment after graduation. This illustrates the interaction between their purposefulness and the contextual risk factors from their families. For some other students, their purposefulness was reflected in their emotional investment in their desired identities related to their role models, including a particular family member or teacher who they had capitalised on in response to difficulties or challenges. This indicates the interaction between the students' purposefulness and contextual factors from familial or institutional aspects of context. Similar complexity in the interactions was also detected as the students displayed their initiative and resourcefulness. Apart from the interactions between the internal factors reflected in the fact that the students' purposefulness had driven them to take the initiative or become resourceful in their learning, their act of taking advantage of the contextual resources from familial, institutional or community aspects of context or the virtual environment revealed the interrelationship between these individual internal factors and the contextual ones. In a similar vein, underlying the students' display of self-awareness were multiple interactions between this internal factor and contextual ones. Many students reported having taken contextual and individual strengths and weaknesses into consideration in the course of overcoming challenges. Such self-evaluation reflected the interactive process where the students related themselves to particular aspects of context. Regardless of the strengths or weaknesses, they had identified, there existed a reciprocal relationship between their self-awareness and contextual or internal factors derived from their interactions with aspects of context.

Less dominant in the data was the students' display of perseverance and optimism which also entailed intricate interactions of the factors. These internal resources were inseparable from both contextual factors and other internal resources such as purposefulness or self-awareness. In particular, the students' perseverance and optimism appeared to have been tied closely to their purposefulness and self-awareness as the students showed a consistent focus on achieving their set goals or an ability to size up their situations by looking at the positive sides of their circumstances. In doing so, the students had unequivocally related themselves to particular aspects of context, which served as an indication of the interrelationship between their internal resources of perseverance and optimism and the contextual factors corresponding to the aspects of context they had related themselves to.

In essence, each layer of interactions of the protective factors forms a unified microsystem of the subsystem of protective factors contributing to the students' resilience in English learning. The students' perceptions of the contextual resources and their internal resources and their interrelationship can be captured in Figure 7.2. which also includes two different circles illustrating the multidimensional aspects of the interactions of the protective factors. The inner circle represents the students' internal resources displayed while they were drawing on supporting resources from contextual aspects represented by four quarters of the outer circle. As with the inner circle in the risk factors diagram, the one in this diagram is expected to work also as a moveable dial, able to represent the nonlinear interactions of the students' internal resources with contextual factors emerging from the students' interactions with different aspects of context.

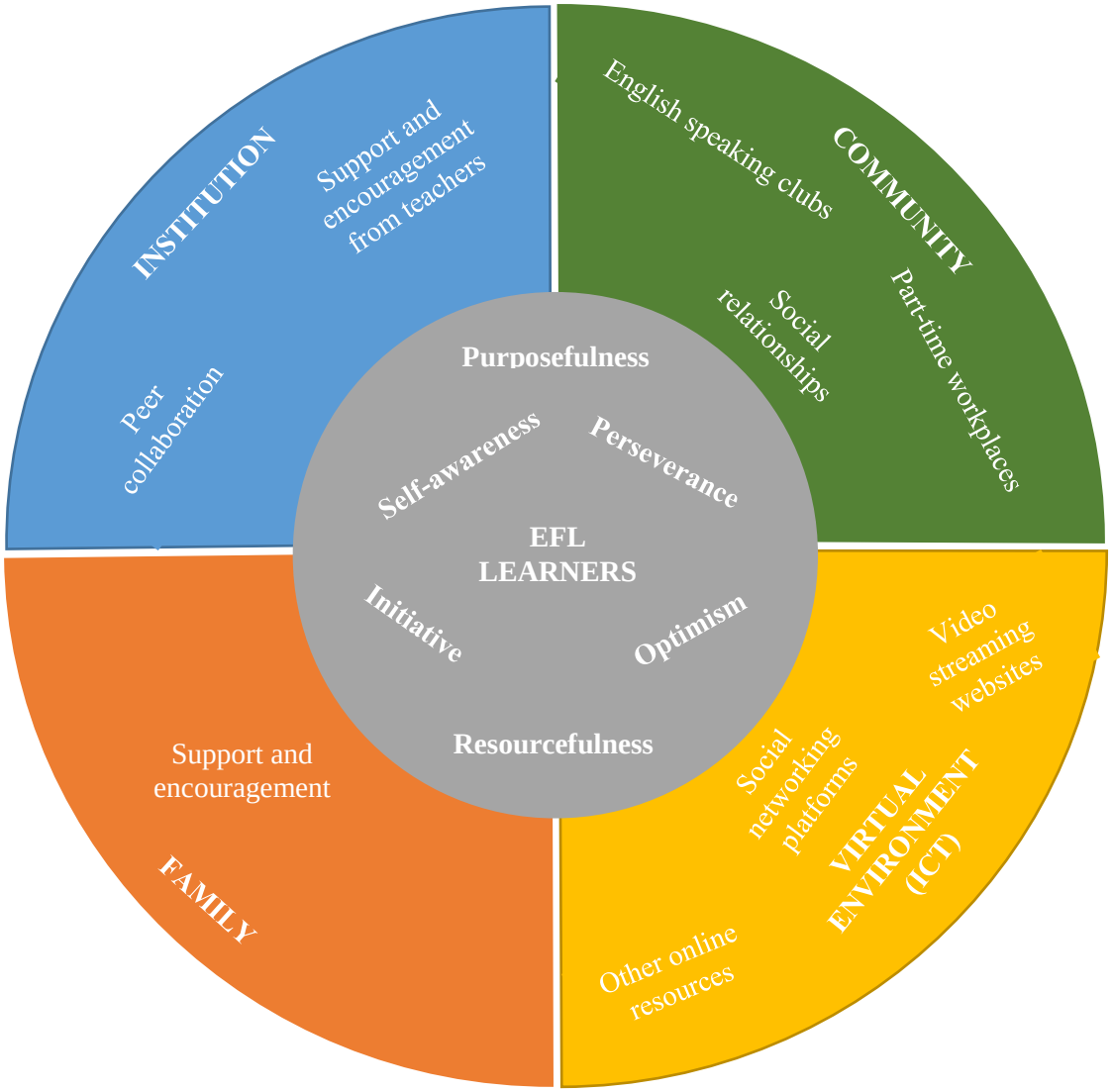

Figure 7.2: Students' perceptions of protective factors

7.1.3. The complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience

Findings from the teachers and students' data have brought to the fore the complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience in the Vietnamese context of English education at the university level. While the teachers' perspectives capture a number of the patterns of the FLLR system in its operation which served as a basis for further exploring FLLR, the students' perspectives unpack the system and provide insights into its components and the complex nonlinear interactions between them. Drawing on the findings from the two phases, the system can be visualised by Figure 7.3 below:

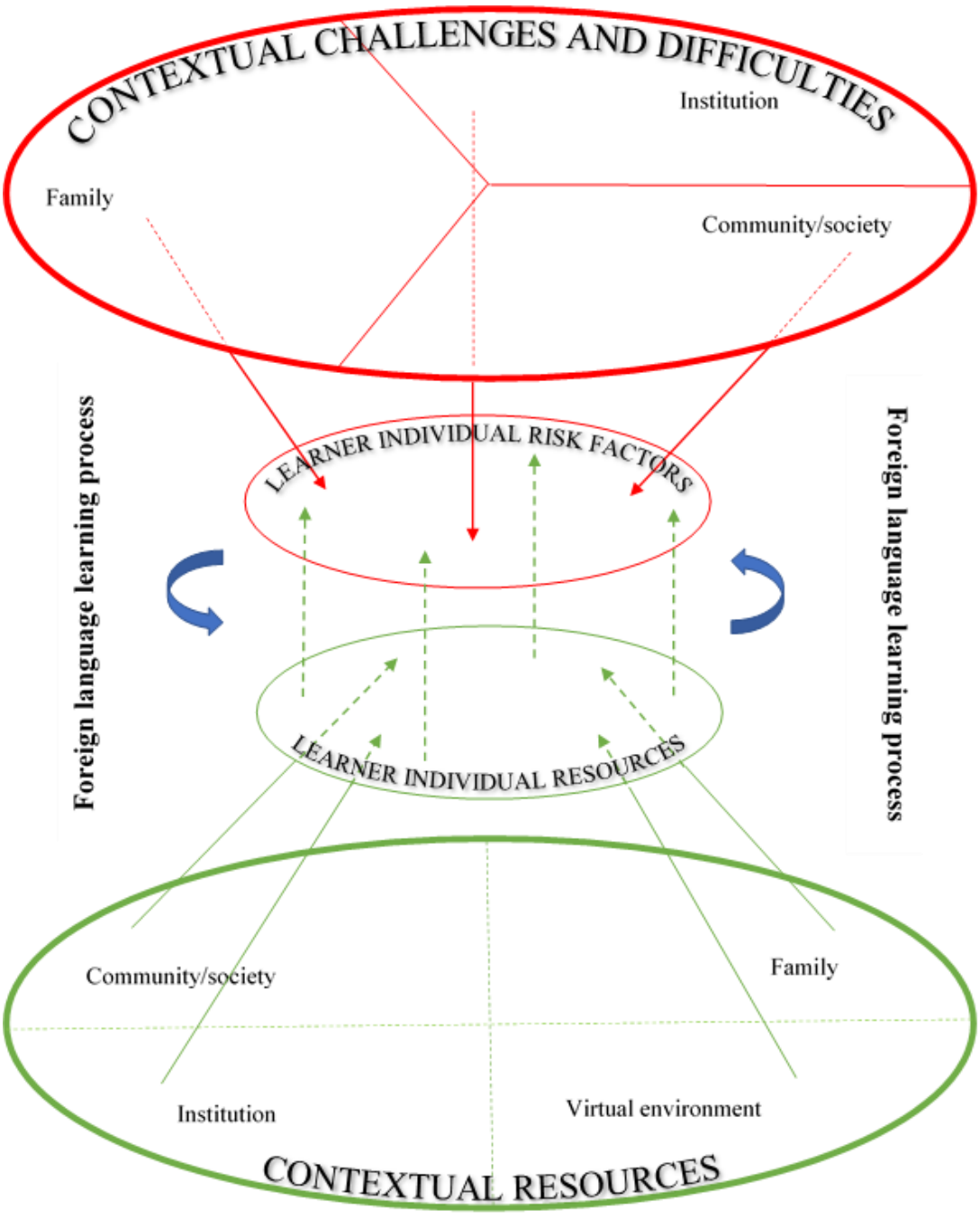

Figure 7.3: The complex dynamic system of FLLR

So far, the visualisation of the concept of foreign language learner resilience has changed significantly since I initially drafted it (see Figure 2.1). Although complex dynamic systems theory has always been core in visualising the concept, the variation in the representations of the concept at different stages in the research journey reflects the development in my understanding of the concept over time.

At the early stage of the research, foreign language learner resilience was delineated as a dynamic but sustained developmental process of adaptation of the language learner in response to the ongoing interactions of counteractive factors emerging from the socio-cultural contexts

where language learning occurs. Despite a perspective of CDST in the conceptualisation of FLLR and the attempt to integrate both socio-cultural and psychological factors, the visualisation of FLLR at that stage appeared to look more like an outcome resulting from the interactions between risk and protective factors, which seemed to contradict the proposed conceptualisation of FLLR as a developmental process. The visualisation of FLLR at that stage reflected my perception of the literature on resilience, individual factors influencing second language acquisition, and CDST. However, it was unable to capture the complexity of the interactions or provide detailed insights into the system components. Although the initial representation of FLLR, without having data to back it up, could not do full justice in delineating the non-linearity and complexity of the interactions within the FLLR system, it has paved the way for further exploring the concept in the later stages.

Attempts were also made to visualise the system of FLLR in action after the first stage of data collection. Data from three focus group discussions with the teachers was salient for the generation of eight resilient learner types viewed as eight patterns of the system in action. However, only two diagrams were developed to represent the *determined* and *passion-driven* learner types and reflect the internal and contextual factors and the sequential interactions of these factors. In fact, the teachers' perspectives contributed to identifying possible factors contributing to the learners' developmental process of resilience. However, their perspectives were bound by their assumptions about the learners' circumstances and their interpretations of the learners' behaviours in the classrooms. Hence, the interactions between factors involved in shaping these resilient learner types seemed to share a typical model. That is, the learners were assumed to have been exposed to particular contextual challenges, then received support from institutional aspects of context (e.g. teachers or peers) which had triggered their individual resources beneficial for overcoming challenges and difficulties to succeed in learning English. This model of interactions revealed little about the multiple interactions of factors involved in the developmental process of resilience. In this view, the visualisation of the remaining learner types appeared not to provide a further understanding of the interactions of the factors, though it would be optimal to have all eight resilient learner types illustrated by diagrams so that the reader could to see the variations of the system in action.

Interviews with the students provided vivid pictures of their learning trajectories, thus allowing me to discover more factors and interactive processes contributing to the development of the complex system of FLLR. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate risk factors and protective factors respectively. These groups of factors emerged as the students interacted with various aspects of context. They are also seen as the two core components or sub-systems of FLLR. While the two

figures reflect the improvement of my understanding of an unpacked complex system composed of subsystems, they were unable to capture the FLLR system's dynamism which involves multiple interactions between contextual and internal factors embedded in the umbrella interaction between the risk factors and protective factors. Therefore, Figure 7.3 is my attempt to represent the system as a whole and in its operation. This figure reflects my fullest up-to-the present understanding of foreign language learner resilience which I define as follows:

> Foreign language learner resilience is a complex dynamic system, composed of sub-systems of contextual and individual factors, emerging from the interactions between the language learner and the aspects of community/society, institutional and familial contexts. The system is characterised by multiple nonlinear interactions between factors both compromising and enabling the language learning process.

As generated by data from both teachers and students, the definition above includes some aspects that have not been covered in the definition proposed at the early stage, re-stated below:

> FLLR might be defined as a dynamic but sustained developmental process of adaptation of the language learner in response to the ongoing interactions of counteractive factors emerging from the socio-cultural contexts where language learning occurs, that is, resilience is a dynamic system, composed of subsystems of contextual factors and psychological factors interwoven during the language learning process.

In terms of the components of FLLR, both definitions have clarified that the system is made up of subsystems of interwoven contextual and individual factors. However, the earlier proposed definition did not indicate the two core dimensions in the concept of resilience – the adversity and the protective factors. This shortcoming has been addressed in the data-informed definition which covers both the negative and positive aspects of the factors influencing the learner or the language learning process.

In terms of the interactions, while the initially proposed definition tended to focus more on the interaction between the counteractive factors that generate the system, the data-informed definition confirms the multiple nonlinear interactions of factors that characterise the dynamic system of FLLR. It expounds on the interrelationship and the nonlinear interactions between individual and contextual factors derived from the interaction between the learner and various contexts, including the virtual environment.

In brief, the above data-informed definition of FLLR has brought to the fore the components of the complex dynamic system of foreign language learner resilience which has not been conceptualised in the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam. It refutes the view of resilience as a fixed trait pertaining to a number of people but not to others as it used to be thought of by pioneer resilience researchers such as Anthony, Gamezy, Rutter, and Werner and Smith (see Vernon, 2004) or later researchers such as Connor and Davidson (2003). The definition also challenges the perspective of SLA researchers who seem to view resilience as a personality factor as seen in studies by Kamali and Fahim (2011) or Kajabadi et al. (2016).

Furthermore, this definition seems to be reinforced by the Dynamic Interactive Model of Resilience (DIMoR) proposed by ahmed Shafi et al. (2020), who also take a perspective of complexity theory in conceptualising educational resilience and believe that "resilience is the emergent property of the range of dynamic and reciprocal interactions between the individual and contextual systems and sub-systems" (p. 189). Their perspective on resilience appears to support the definition of FLLR in that it not only re-affirms the dynamism of resilience mediated by the interactions but also emphasises the interconnectedness between the individual and contexts. This perspective on the interconnectedness also aligns with SLA scholars who view second/foreign language learning/development as a complex dynamic system and place a strong emphasis on context as an integral factor of the system (See for example De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011; De Bot et al., 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b), and those who call for a focus on the interplay between the learner and contexts in researching the second/foreign language learning (See for example Dörnyei, 2009a; King, 2016; Mercer, 2016; Ushioda, 2009, 2015).

7.2. The interplay between individual factors and the contexts

According to Mercer (2016), although context has been acknowledged as an indispensable element to consider in contemporary SLA research, taking a complexity-informed perspective requires a deeper consideration of context and its relationship to learners. The traditional conceptualisation of context as a monolithic backdrop, having a uni-directional influence on learners and their learning process, fails to capture the reciprocal nature of the relationship between context and learners (See for example Dörnyei, 2009a; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b; Mercer, 2016; Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda, 2015). Ushioda (2009) for example argues that a situated approach to examining learners' individual differences such as motivation can provide little information about how and why the motivation of a particular student fluctuates

while that student is situated in particular learning environments. She later explains that such an approach to investigating individual differences has singled out learners and contexts by putting learners in particular types of contexts which are seen as "independent external variables [having] influences on learner-internal variables" (Ushioda, 2015, p. 47). Instead, context from the perspective of CDST is not seen as a static entity separate from learners, but is part of learners and may vary in accordance with learners' different identities and individual characteristics demonstrated through their cognitive, emotional and physical interactions with the surrounding social environment across time.

As mentioned in section 7.1.3., the system of foreign language learner resilience was generated by the intricate interactions between the individual inner factors and contextual factors emerging from the students' interaction with aspects of society/community, familial and institutional contexts. This has shown that individual internal factors and context are inseparable. This reciprocal relationship was enabled through the ongoing interaction between the students and their surrounding environment throughout their learning trajectories. This section discusses how foreign language learner resilience was generated through the interplay between the individual factors and the three contextual dimensions.

7.2.1. Motivation in relation to contexts

Motivation has been widely recognised as one of the most pivotal individual factors that can predict success in learning a second/foreign language (Dörnyei, 1998). This individual factor has also been identified as a protective factor in resilience research (See for example Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001; Waxman et al., 2003; Werner, 1997). This study found that motivation is one of the components of the system of foreign language learner resilience. Although this finding aligns with previous studies in resilience, it differs from these studies in that motivation is not a fixed element contributing to making up resilience. Instead, as a component in the complex system of FLLR, motivation waxed and waned over time, throughout the students' learning trajectories, and in accordance with their experiences in different contexts that they interacted with. It is also important to note that the fluctuation of the students' motivation is not always in alignment with resilience though it contributes to shaping resilience.

Salient in the data from semi-structured interviews was the students' low level of motivation at the beginning of their English learning trajectories. This low motivation was derived from the students' interaction with aspects in the community/social context. As members of their hometown communities, the students attributed the unfavourable socio-economic and

geographical conditions of their hometowns to the delayed or limited English learning opportunity and the lack of an environment for authentic English practice which often resulted in their low level of motivation. The interrelationship between the students' low level of motivation and their perception of the contextual risk factors derived from the socio-economic and geographical conditions of their hometowns reflected in the analysis of semi-structured interview data which can be found in sections 5.1.1 and 6.1.1.

At some other points in their learning pathway, the students' motivational trajectory appeared to go upward as they interacted in familial and institutional contexts. For example, one of the participants in the first-year student cohort tended to internalise her emotional hardship derived from her family break-up and use it to motivate her learning (see section 5.2.1.1 for first-year student's perception of parental support and encouragement – Uyen's case). In another case, a first-year student found herself inspired and motivated as she interacted with a more capable peer who set a good example for her to follow and provided her support and encouragement in learning (see section 5.2.1.2 for first-year students' perception of relationship and collaboration with peers – Ha's case).

Another upward trend in the students' motivation associated with institutional context can be illustrated by H'Nhe's case – a fourth-year student. H'Nhe's motivation seemed to reach the highest level on the continuum when she talked about how she had been inspired and supported by a teacher at the university (see section 6.2.2.2. for fourth-year students' perception of support and inspiration from teachers – H'Nhe's case).

The students' motivation also fluctuated as the students interacted with different people at different points in time within the same contextual dimension. This happened to Thu, a fourth-year student, who reported having experienced a decrease in motivation studying English with a "bad-tempered" grade 8 teacher and then gained her motivation back when she had the opportunity to study English with her "tourist-guide" teacher whom she met in her grade 6.

This finding also distinguishes this study from a handful of studies of resilience in foreign language learning in terms of the way motivation is included in the conceptualisation of resilience. For example, Oxford et al. (2007) noticed that motivation contributed to the learner's ability to overcome L2 learning crises. However, motivation in Oxford et al's study was not included as part of resilience but rather of self-determination. Although the authors found that resilience and self-determination contributed to the learners' ability to overcome L2 crises, they seemed to see resilience and self-determination as personal qualities, thus inadvertently

stabilising motivation. Nguyen et al. (2015) did not mention motivation in their research. Instead, they identified "sense of purpose" as one of the factors in the inventory of protective factors contributing to resilience. Although this sense of purpose seemed to resemble the ideal L2 self in the L2 motivation self system, it cannot be equated with motivation because it was delineated as the students' clear personal goals which made it a monolithic concept. This does not seem a valid conceptualisation from a complexity-informed perspective.

In essence, motivation in this study attests to the relational view of motivation proposed by Ushioda (2009) as it evolved in accord with the students' interaction with aspects of contexts throughout their learning process. The participants' motivation is also compatible with the L2 motivational self-system model developed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009b) in that the students seemed to have been motivated by their imagined identities as reflected in the cases above of Ha and H'Nhe who put efforts into their learning in an attempt to bridge the gap between their current selves and their ideal selves. This again evidences the fact that motivation in this study is not static but emerges over time (and dissipates) in accordance with the students' interactions with various contextual dimensions.

7.2.2. Emotion in relation to contexts

This study showed that emotion is a constituent of the FLLR system. Emotion was found to be evolving over the students' learning trajectories as they interacted with aspects within different contextual dimensions. This finding is compatible with previous studies into the role of emotions in resilience. In particular, negative emotions such as anxiety, depression and stress stemming from traumatic events can be mitigated by positive emotions (See for example Bonano, 2004; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Salient in the data were emotions emerging from the students' interaction with familial and institutional contexts. While anxiety, lack of self-efficacy, frustration and sadness were dominant in the data as negative emotions, inspiration was a common positive emotion reported by the student participants. In most of the students' cases, negative and positive emotions were reported as having compromised and enabled their learning respectively. However, there were also cases where negative emotions served as catalysts for a sense of purpose which subsequently contributed to the students' motivation to overcome the contextual and individual challenges. Below are two typical first-year student participants, Nhu and Uyen, whose cases have been presented in findings chapter 5. However, summaries of their cases can capture the interplay between the students' emotions and the contexts and illustrate the non-linear causality between emotions and second/foreign language learning.

Nhu came from a remote area in a central highlands province in Vietnam before her enrolment in the English language programme. Her negative emotions were derived from her interactions with her peers and teachers throughout her English learning trajectory. In the first incident, Nhu was hurt when her high school peer criticised her English proficiency level. While such feelings as shock and frustration could have entailed a negative reaction from Nhu such as giving up English, Nhu shared the experience with her mother, who supported her to gain back her momentum to become a university student of English. Nhu's second experience seemed to have a serious emotional impact. In particular, Nhu was embarrassed when asked by her university teacher to leave the writing skill class. What's more, she felt ashamed by her classmates's puzzling look as she was not able to answer her teacher's simple question. Again, Nhu seemed to transcend these negative emotions and transform them into a sense of purpose guiding her actions in response to her poor performance (see section 5.1.3.3 for students' perception of risks from interaction with their peers and section 5.2.5.2 for internal resources as internal protective factors – Nhu's case)

While Nhu's emotional development was linked to the institutional context, Uyen's emotions evolved in association with her family context. Uyen reported that she had been suffering from emotional hardship because of her family break-up. Her father sent her to live with her form teacher who eventually adopted her. Uyen's emotional hardship might have resulted in a negative consequence such as losing motivation in learning, yet it drove her to put more effort into learning to show her love and gratitude to her father (see section 5.2.1.1 for first-year student's perception of parental support and encouragement – Uyen's case).

The above summaries have not only captured the interplay between the learner's emotions but also revealed the nonlinear causal relationship between emotions and second/foreign language learning. This finding reaffirms the significance of emotions in second/foreign language learning while refuting the traditional uni-directional view of the causal relationship between negative emotions and foreign/second language learning where a negative emotion such as anxiety is likely to be detrimental to the process of second/foreign language learning (C.f. Imai, 2010; Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013).

Furthermore, most students in this study reported making an effort in learning English despite contextual and internal challenges because they were inspired by a sense of purpose. Their purposefulness could be related to either future career or studying abroad or simply becoming as good as their more capable peers. This finding attests to the notion of L2 emotional investment described as the use of emotions, emerging from learning experiences, to evaluate

situations and make decisions on whether changes in terms of goals or plans need to be made or not, and what actions need to be taken to secure the investments in a desired or imagined identity (c.f. Gallucci, 2013; Pavlenko, 2012). For example, Uyen, the above-mentioned student, appeared to invest in her desired identity when she talked about the motive that drove her to overcome challenges, which was to be a tourist guide and an interpreter.

As the reader may recall from sections 5.1.2.2 and 5.1.3.2., Uyen seemed to be aware of her emotions emerging in different contexts over her learning trajectory, including nervousness and anxiety in her listening skill class at the university, and sadness from her family's circumstance. She put an effort into dealing with her emotions. As Uyen seemed to be able to evaluate how these negative emotions might threaten her employment goal and also to show gratitude to her father, she overcame them and put more effort into learning English.

7.2.3. Agency and autonomy in relation to contexts

"Successful language learning depends crucially on the activity and initiative of the learner" (van Lier, 2004, p. 163). While this statement was used to support the notion of agency presented in the literature review, it also encompasses the notion of autonomy. Indeed, Benson (2007) argues that "agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy" (p. 30). Data from students' interviews evidenced that in response to challenges and difficulties the students exercised their agency and displayed autonomous learning behaviours. In other words, both agency and autonomy contributed to shaping the students' resilience in learning English. More importantly, the data showed that when the students showed their autonomous learning behaviours, they appeared to have already exercised their agency through relating themselves to specific situations they were in. For example, Nha, a first-year student, set up learning goals and a plan when reflecting on her performance and unsatisfactory results of her first semester. In doing so, she had already exercised her agency (see section 5.2.5.2. for first-year students' initiative and resourcefulness). In other words, "their capacity to take control or take charge of their own learning" (Benson, 2011a, p. 14) presupposed their "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112).

Findings about the students' agency and autonomy partly align with that of Werner (1997) and those of a scant number of SLA researchers such as Kajabadi et al. (2016); Kamali and Fahim (2011); Nguyen et al. (2015); Oxford et al. (2007) in that autonomy plays an important role in shaping resilience or correlates with resilience. However, as the above-mentioned researchers

tend to see resilience as a trait, autonomy is viewed as a personal trait as well, thus being a static individual factor.

Resilience in this study is conceptualised as a complex dynamic system composed of subsystems interacting with each other and with the environment. This is where this finding diverges from the above-mentioned research studies into resilience in foreign/second language learning. As aforementioned, the interview data evidenced that agency and autonomy were constructed through the students' interaction with various aspects of contextual dimensions. The students' interactions with different contexts activated their agency which subsequently facilitated their autonomous learning behaviours. To elaborate, the students' agency was triggered by their self-awareness or evaluation of the contextual factors both detrimental and conducive to their learning, and their purposefulness, which was also derived from the students' interaction with the context. These individual resources sequentially fed into their autonomy represented through their initiative and resourcefulness in their learning despite challenges and difficulties. This finding, therefore, supports the relational view of agency and autonomy, whose definitions as cognitive or social processes have been a debated issue among scholars of different fields (c.f. Ahearn, 2001; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Huang & Benson, 2013). Although this mechanism is prevalent in the data, it was reflected clearly in a fourth-year student's description of how she navigated her English learning in the face of a lack of an environment for her to practise the language. In particular, Ngoc, the fourth-year student, decided to use Facebook as a platform for practising English, instead of waiting to be provided with an environment to do so (see section 6.2.5.2. for fourth-year students' initiative and resourcefulness). Ngoc's description of how she generated her learning environment indicates her evaluation of the contextual challenges she was facing with her English, including the lack of an environment for practising language skills. However, she appeared to be purposeful as she realised that "English is important for [her] future" in order to emulate her uncle whom she had always admired (see section 6.2.5.2. for further analysis of Ngoc's purposefulness). Drawing on her purposefulness and evaluation of the contextual difficulties and advantages, Ngoc exercised her agency as she took the initiative to make changes and overcome the difficulties. She displayed the capacity to take control of her learning as she could practise her English speaking skill every day with her Facebook friends who also shared the same English-speaking need.

7.2.4. Perseverance and optimism in relation to contexts

Although optimism has been documented as one of the individual protective factors (c.f. Connor & Davidson, 2003; Levine, 2003), perseverance is hardly mentioned as a protective factor in the literature on resilience. This study indicated that both perseverance and optimism contribute to the process of resilience in learning English. In particular, interview data showed that student participants displaying perseverance tended to focus consistently on achieving their set goals despite difficulties or challenges and those showing optimism appeared to think positively in the face of difficulties or challenges.

Although this finding seems not completely consistent with resilience research in terms of including perseverance as a component of resilience, it converges with some research in the field of second language learning. For example, Oxford and Bolaños-Sánchez (2016) delineated perseverance as "a continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties", being composed of "resilience, hope, optimism, and [learning] strategy use" (p. 119). They identified perseverance as one of the factors leading to successful language learning. Kim et al. (2018) also found Korean EFL learners made " an effort to achieve [their] goals without giving up" despite demotivation and disappointment in language learning as a component of resilience in foreign language learning. However, they used the term *tenacity* instead of perseverance to describe "the ability to continue learning even when demotivated and disappointed" (p. 62). In their research on the influence of resilience on Korean elementary students' (de)motivation and second language proficiency, Kim et al. (2019) also identified perseverance as one of the components of resilience.

Furthermore, while these two individual factors are often viewed as individualistic, they appear relational in this current study as the students tended to associate their consistent focus on achieving goals and/or positive thinking with the difficulties or challenges emerging from particular contexts. Also, the students' perseverance and optimism seemed to link to other individual factors contributing to shaping their resilience. The analyses of the students' perseverance and optimism can be found in sections 5.2.5.4 and 6.2.5.4. However, the discussions of the following students' cases are briefly revisited in an attempt to highlight the relational nature of these two individual factors and their relationship with other individual factors.

My, one of the participants in the first-year cohort, found herself inspired by the English teaching profession after five years working in the foreign trade industry (see section 5.2.5.1

for her purposefulness). She showed her perseverance as she decided to "retake the university entrance examination" to study toward the Bachelor's degree in English education With the desire to become an English teacher. However, her perseverance might not have taken shape if she had not interacted with contextual difficulties in her hometown, let alone her interactions with other contextual aspects that inspired her to give up her job and study English language education. My's case also reflects the interconnectedness between her perseverance and other individual factors, including motivation, agency and autonomy. While her motivation drove her to make an effort in learning, her agency enabled her to make the decision, become autonomous in her learning and consistently focus on achieving her goal.

The relational aspect of optimism can be seen in Ngoc's case, the fourth-year student, whose discussion about the emergence of her agency and autonomy in relation to different contexts was presented in section 7.2.3. Ngoc identified herself as a typical language learner characterised by her optimism. Her optimism appeared to relate closely to her purposefulness, agency and autonomy. She reported that she was able to look into the positive side of her situation. Ngoc believed that while her peers might give up learning with the lack of a learning environment, she instead took the initiative and became resourceful as she managed to find solutions to her own learning problems and generated her own environment to practise her speaking skills.

7.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has summarised and discussed the key findings of the current study through the lens of complex dynamic system theory. Findings from the first phase of data collection provided a holistic view of foreign language learner resilience through eight different typical learner types, representing typical patterns of a complex dynamic system in action. Built upon findings from the first phase, the second phase of data collection was aimed at teasing out the system's components. Findings from this phase indicated contextual and individual factors compromising the students' English learning process and those enabling their learning. Findings from the two phases of data collection indicated that foreign language learner resilience is a complex dynamic system composed of subsystems of contextual and individual factors emerging from the learners' interactions with aspects of three contextual dimensions, namely community/society, institution, and family. The system is characterised by multiple non-linear interactions between risk factors and protective factors respectively detrimental and conducive to the language learning process. Regarding risk factors, the students reported having experienced a lack of motivation, lack of self-efficacy, anxiety, and sadness derived from

contextual challenges or difficulties such as delayed/limited learning opportunity and lack of environment for (authentic) language practice due to disadvantageous socio-economic and geographical conditions, grammar-based teaching practices, teachers' lack of support, peers' lack of engagement, and familial issues or upheavals. Regarding protective factors, the students reported having gained motivation and positive emotions, displayed their perseverance and optimism in the face of difficulties and challenges, and taken the initiative in learning, drawing on family and institutional support and encouragement, along with resources from the virtual environment.

The discussion about the interplay between the individual factors and the contexts has provided further insights into the temporal and relational aspects of the individual factors contributing to shaping the students' resilience in English language learning. In particular, motivation, emotions, agency, autonomy, perseverance, and optimism are seen as core individual factors of the system of FLLR. These individual factors fluctuated and developed in close relation to the contextual challenges/difficulties or resources the students experienced throughout their learning trajectories. The insight into the temporal and relational aspects of the individual factors, seen as subsystems of FLLR, reinforces the argument that FLLR is a complex dynamic system and distinguishes this current study from those of a scant number of SLA researchers investigating resilience and viewing it as a static personality individual characteristic.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This current study aimed to explore the concept of foreign language learner resilience (FLLR) in the Vietnamese context of English education at the university level. Findings of the study have revealed that FLLR is an adaptation process where the learner capitalises upon the contextual and internal resources, stemming from their ongoing interaction with the environment, to withstand and/or overcome the adversity confronting them across their language learning trajectory. In light of CDST, FLLR is conceptualised as a complex dynamic system composed of interconnected subsystems of multiple contextual and individual factors, interacting over time. The system in action keeps foreign language learning sustained.

To conclude the thesis, this chapter outlines the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the research, followed by the implications for Vietnamese university-level English language teachers, administrators or policy-makers whose actions contribute to promoting foreign language learner resilience and improving foreign language learning and teaching in Vietnam. The chapter ends by acknowledging the limitations of the research and recommending areas for future research.

8.2. Contributions

Although resilience appears to be a ubiquitous concept and has been researched substantially in a wide range of disciplines, it has been little researched in the SLA field (Kim & Kim, 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Oxford et al., 2007). This current study, therefore, adds to the literature on resilience in foreign language learning in a number of respects.

8.2.1. Theoretical contributions

So far, most SLA researchers interested in resilience in second/foreign language learning have tended to view it as a personality trait, thus relying on resilience scales previously developed by scholars in psychology to conceptualise (and measure) resilience within their studies. Such conceptualisation seems unlikely to do full justice to resilience in the distinctive and complex process of language learning. This current study fills this gap by providing a new understanding of resilience drawing on the perspectives of participants in this process. In effect, this study has explored and constructed resilience distinctively for the process of foreign language learning. Rather than a personality trait, this study has affirmed that resilience is a process whereby foreign language learners capitalise on resources derived from their ongoing interactions with the environment to bounce back from difficulties and challenges emerging throughout the

language learning process. More importantly, in bringing the concept of foreign language learner resilience and its constituents to the fore, the study has also revealed that success in foreign language learning can be influenced by a synergy of contextual and individual factors that have previously been considered disparately by SLA scholars. Indeed, such a holistic and systemic conceptualisation of foreign language learner resilience has been enabled by a complexity-informed perspective on resilience and the foreign language learning process.

The concept of resilience might not be foreign to the Vietnamese peoples who have risen from the consequences of wars across the history of development. Although the concept seems to feature in Vietnamese culture as it is defined in English-Vietnamese dictionaries as *Kiên cường* (see for example http://tratu.soha.vn/dict/en_vn/Resilience), the concept has not been introduced to the context of foreign language education in Vietnam so far. This study makes a conceptual contribution to English language teaching and learning in Vietnam by providing a new perspective on success in foreign language learning in this context.

8.2.2. Methodological contributions

This study has drawn on the perspective of CDST to frame its research methodology. Hence, foreign language learner resilience, seen as a complex dynamic system, was examined retrospectively (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b). Despite acknowledging the idea of tracing the system from the outcomes emerging from the system's self-organising process, this study did not follow Dörnyei's (2011) Retro-dictive Qualitative Modelling template rigidly like other complexity-informed studies by researchers such as Chan et al. (2014); Gillies (2014) or Hiver (2017).

Instead of using focus group discussions to generate learner archetypes, this study used focus group discussions with "people who have spent a long time in the system" (Gillies, 2014, p. 67) to identify typical resilient learners seen as possible outcomes of the system. The focus group data was used as a basis for developing the data collection tool in the second stage of the research, not for nominating participants matching the archetypes. Instead, the participants in the second stage of this study self-identified as resilient learners by answering two criterial questions (see Appendix C). This purposive sampling helped identify more possible outcomes of the system from which the system's components were teased out. This can be seen as a contribution of this study to help inform studies using research methods framed by CDST. In particular, while Dörnyei (2011) and those adopting the RQM research template draw on the self-organising characteristic to argue for the limited range of the outcomes, or "salient

outcomes" (Hiver, 2017, p. 672) the system might produce, they seem to overlook the differing contexts connected with the individual subsystems within the whole system, hence the contingency and variability of the system. The idea of learner archetypes seems like "[averaging across individuals" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b, p. 205), thus probably failing to represent "all possible states of the system" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008b, p. 204). This limitation has been acknowledged in Chan, Dörnyei, and Henry's (2014) study as they found that the nominated participants did not always match the learner archetypes generated beforehand. This also means that salient outcomes of the system could have been inadequately captured. The methods used in this study have compensated for this methodological limitation by exposing possible outcomes. Furthermore, the triangulation of data from different sources, including the teachers and students from the two year-group, contributed to enhancing data saturation (c.f. Fusch & Ness, 2015) regarding the possible outcomes of the FLLR system.

8.2.3. Practical contributions

In addition to the conceptual contribution mentioned above, this current study makes a number of practical contributions to English language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam. The findings of this study have uncovered both contextual and individual difficulties and challenges university EFL learners in Vietnam might experience across their learning trajectories. An awareness of these difficulties and challenges will undoubtedly help the teachers better understand the learners, establish a more positive rapport with them, promote a collaborative learning environment that subsequently smooths the learning pathway (Downey, 2008). This study also reveals resources that English learners at the tertiary level in Vietnam can draw on in the face of challenges or difficulties, ranging from members of their families, peers and teachers in the institutional context to people in the community or the virtual environment. Knowing these available resources, and taking the initiative in capitalising upon them, contribute to the learners' capacity to withstand and bounce back from adversity, sustain and/or make improvement in language learning.

8.3. Implications

8.3.1. For teachers of English

> Schools and classrooms are a major arena for the social, emotional and cognitive development of the students. They are designed to support, nurture and encourage optimal academic and social development in children and young persons, including vulnerable ones (Cefai, 2007, p. 120).

The above comment highlights the role of the institutional environment in preparing learners for achievement or success. Key in this environment are the teachers whose role is indispensable in shaping learners' resilience (c.f. Cefai, 2007; Downey, 2008; Wang et al., 1997). Although Cefai's comment tends to focus more on children and young persons, it still applies to the participants in this study as the findings revealed that student participants could draw on their English teachers at different levels of education to overcome difficulties and challenges across their learning trajectories. Indeed, while family-related or community-related factors might be beyond the teachers' control, teachers' actions within the institutional context can contribute to generating a synergy of motivation, positive emotions, autonomy and agency, perseverance and optimism that help the learners withstand challenges and difficulties to succeed in foreign language learning (c.f. Oxford & Bolaños-Sánchez, 2016).

The fact that low levels of motivation, anxiety and nervousness derived from the students' interactions with their teachers were prevalent in the data in this study implies a likelihood that teachers of English at university know little about the students' past experiences, learning trajectories and antecedents that trigger their emotions. However, the findings of this current study also indicate that teachers' support and encouragement were perceived as protective factors that helped mitigate challenges and difficulties in the students' learning process. Drawing on this institution-related resource, the students' positive emotions, motivation and autonomy developed. Some students in this study described their teachers as role models whose success and achievements drove them to invest emotionally in their desired identities. Additionally, giving "flexible" appropriate feedback on students' work, sharing learning tips and resources and creating engaging learning activities were the most common teacher-initiated supportive activities reported by the student participants as having boosted their confidence and motivated them to take the initiative in learning English despite difficulties and challenges (see section 5.2.2.2 and 6.2.2.2). All of these would not have been possible and effective without "teacher-student rapport" (Downey, 2008, p. 57). According to Wang et al. (1997), maintaining a close teacher-student relationship "can reduce stress and provide positive support" (p. 4).

In light of the above, it is suggested that teachers of English at university in Vietnam establish a closer relationship with their students. Positive and supportive relationships bring about a sense of relatedness for the students, promote their positive emotions, reduce their anxiety and allow the teachers to cater better for the student's learning needs. When the students recognise their teacher as a "reliable social support", their resilience in foreign language learning is enhanced (Kim et al., 2018, p. 62). More specifically, teachers can act as role models by sharing their learning histories with the students (as seen typically in H'Nha's account presented in

section 6.2.2.2) to give them a sense of purpose and motivate them in addition to finding teaching methods to engage learning, sharing learning tips and resources, and creating a collaborative learning environment to promote autonomous learning. They should also take into account the students' emotional well-being by functioning as mentors whose role goes "beyond the regular classroom responsibilities" (Oxford & Bolaños-Sánchez, 2016, p. 123). These might include showing care for the students' challenges and difficulties, assisting them in finding problem-solving or stress-coping strategies, encouraging and enhancing students' self-efficacy by acknowledging students' effort and achievement.

Although the supporting activities may vary depending on the teachers' initiative, drawing on the findings of this study, these can be carried out in several ways. For example, at the beginning of the course, teachers can organise a discussion session in which students share their difficulties and challenges in learning and seek advice from the teacher and their peers as well. This activity could not only help teachers establish teacher-student rapport and learn about the students but also promote mutual understanding among students, contributing to creating a collaborative learning environment. The activity can be enhanced by providing students with a pre-designed form for self-reflection on challenges/difficulties and problem-solving strategies across three contextual dimensions (community, family, and institution). While this self-reflection activity can serve as a talking point for students and teachers, the activity can also be a reference point for teachers to see how the students are going as it also allows the students to share their learning goals and speculate on resources they might be able to draw on to overcome challenges or difficulties. (See Appendix O for an example)

Most students in this study reported having taken advantage of the virtual environment to sustain and make improvements in their English learning. Therefore, teachers can also create such an educational and supportive environment using a particular social media platform to provide ongoing support throughout the students' learning. While this seems to add more to the teachers' responsibilities which are inherently many, such a virtual environment is likely to provide a collaborative environment where the teachers can work together to share their experiences to provide both learning and emotional support for students. They are actually not on their own because the environment is likely to trigger a more collaborative environment where students can support each other academically and emotionally.

A number of the suggestions above entail reducing the social distance between teachers and students. The dominance of the Confucian values and beliefs in the Vietnamese classroom culture and the respective roles of teachers and students may hinder this shift. However, a closer

social relationship will bring significant benefits not only to students but also to teachers. Teaching is likely to be easier and more satisfying with more motivated, autonomous and resilient learners. Teachers then could be encouraged to engage in this type of "cost-benefit analysis" in any professional development that seeks to explore changes to traditional perceptions of teacher-student roles.

8.3.2. For administrators and policy-makers

In recent years, a great deal of effort has been made on the part of the Vietnamese Government and its educational system to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages, especially English at different educational levels. The issuing of the Decision 1400/QD-TTg on the approval of the project Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national educational system in the period 2008-2020 (also known as the National Foreign Languages Project 2020) and the implementation of this project can be seen as a typical example of the attempt to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. To achieve its expected outcome, various project agendas were implemented. These included redesigning the curriculum, setting the National English proficiency benchmarks compatible with the CEFR (Common European Framework of References for Languages), training English language teachers to improve both their English proficiency and teaching methodology, and promoting the application of ICT in language teaching (Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2019; Tran, 2020). Although these technical measures have made positive changes to the Vietnamese context of teaching and learning EFL in terms of raising social awareness of the importance of a foreign language in the international integration context, they seemed to reflect a unidirectional view on the process of language learning. In other words, there seemed to be the belief that the technical measures aforementioned would lead to the improvement of the quality of English education.

The findings of the present study have pointed to the fact that second/foreign language learning is more than a cognitive process (c.f. Block, 2003). In fact, as we know from the study, the second/foreign language learning process involves layers upon layers of non-linear interactions between the contextual and psychological factors of the stakeholders. It is so dynamic that it is neither bound by the classroom nor dependent on the teaching only. SLA research has indicated that foreign language learners take on different selves or shift their identities across their language learning process as they interact with different contexts (See for example Dörnyei, 2009a; King, 2016; Mercer, 2016; Ushioda, 2009). Learners' individual factors such as motivation, emotion, agency and autonomy fluctuate in association with the different contexts

they interact with. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that a complexity-informed resilience perspective on foreign language learning is likely to contribute to designing policies and setting agendas for improving English language education in Vietnam as it offers insights into the contextual and individual factors compromising and enabling the language learning process in the Vietnamese context and the interconnectedness of these factors. As such, in addition to remedial measures such as re-designing curriculum, improving teachers' proficiency and teaching methodology, or promoting ICT application in teaching and learning, raising teachers' awareness of how the variation of learners' individual factors emerging from different contexts influence language learning is likely to contribute to improving English language education in Vietnam. This can be done by incorporating content on learners' individual factors, their interaction, and resilience in professional development courses for both EFL teachers and teacher-trainers.

At a macro level, except for the insight into the complexity of the interactions between contextual and individual factors influencing success in foreign language learning, which Vietnamese policymakers may want to account for, the findings of this study may not offer further implications. Thus far, the Vietnamese Government and its educational system, in their capacity, have taken all possible measures to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Vietnam. Their efforts are represented in the issuing of policy conducive to the improvement of foreign language education and the implementation of the National Foreign Languages Project. However, at the institutional level, the findings of this study are likely to provide institutional administrators with information essential for creating favourable conditions for language learning. For example, the findings revealed that students displayed discontent and demotivation because of the inappropriate practices and policy related to assessment weighting. This can be an issue that institutional administrators may want to address so that students feel that their efforts throughout the learning process are acknowledged more adequately.

The findings of this study also indicated that more first-year students seemed to rely on support and encouragement from their families to overcome challenges and difficulties in their learning than their senior peers. It can be speculated that first-year students were new to the university learning environment and not yet able to establish new relationships in the environment. At a lower level of administration, this might suggest to university and faculty leaders that they organise activities that familiarise new students with the university environment. These might include extra-curriculum activities where new students can develop their sense of belonging to the new learning environment and learn more about the resources, including but not limited to

their teachers and senior or more capable peers who they can draw on in the face of difficulties and challenges.

While a network of advisors working collaboratively to support students is likely to be initiated by the teachers, faculty leaders might contribute to the operation of this network by organising professional development workshops where administrators and teachers can share experiences and initiatives in how to support students' learning more effectively.

8.4. Limitations and recommendations for further research

8.4.1. Limitations of the study

This study has introduced a relatively unfamiliar concept to the context of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam, provided an in-depth description of contextual and individual factors influencing English language learner at the university level in Vietnam, and contributed to SLA literature a new understanding of resilience in second/foreign language learning. However, it is not without limitations.

Firstly, the collected data of this research project is contextually bound by a small sample size of teachers and students from a university in the central highlands of Vietnam. Though similar findings are likely to be generated in other similar settings of tertiary English education, they are not generalisable to other contexts. In fact this is not a limitation per se. Rather, it is a fact assumed to be unproblematic in qualitative approaches to research, and particularly those taking a complex systems view.

Secondly, as all focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure the participants' comfort in expressing ideas and my full understanding, I transcribed and translated the data into English on my own. Despite my attempt to be faithful to the participants' words, my translation might not have captured the nuances and full meaning of the Vietnamese transcript versions due to cultural differences inherent in both the languages used. Additionally, the findings of this study were based on my interpretation of a selected number of quotes from the participants' responses, thus bias was inevitable. However, triangulating data from different sources was my response to compensate for this limitation and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Thirdly, in an attempt to provide a holistic view of the system under investigation, identify the system's components and represent the dynamics of the system, sequentially developmental data collection methods were designed for this study. Accordingly, focus group data was used

to develop questions for semi-structured interviews. However, as the timeframe for collecting data was limited, the development of the semi-structured interview questions was based on the preliminary analysis rather than the second stage of analysis of the focus group data. I acknowledge this as a methodological limitation. Nonetheless, the rigour of the research was assured to an extent by the development of the semi-structured interview protocol, pilot testing the questions, and refinement of the questions before putting them into use.

Lastly, although the study has brought to the fore the concept of foreign language learner resilience, identifying its components, and representing the dynamics of the system through thick descriptions of multiple interactions of the contextual and individual factors, it has not been able to establish the signature dynamics of the system which can be done by further in-depth analysis of the interview data.

8.4.2. Recommendations for further research

As aforementioned, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other contexts as the collected data was contextually confined to a particular university in a Vietnamese central highlands province. Further research can be done to see if these or similar findings can be generated in other contexts of English language learning and teaching at the university level.

This study used interview methods for data collection which was conducted within a short period of time (two months). Its findings provide a holistic view of foreign language learner resilience and insights into its constituents, but they could not capture the real-time development of resilience in foreign language learning. Further longitudinal research using other research methods to capture the interaction and fluctuation of factors contributing to shaping foreign language learner resilience at a micro level and in real-time would offer an even more contextually nuanced view of resilience as a system.

This study explored the concept of resilience in foreign language learning in general. Building on the findings of this research, further studies could explore intervention programmes to foster foreign language learner resilience. In addition, further inquiries into resilience in learning specific skills of English may help gain further insight into the learners' capacity to bounce back from challenges in learning these particular skills.

Although this study has brought to the fore the concept of resilience in foreign language learning at the university level in Vietnam, it focused on the learners only. According to Hiver (2018), foreign language teachers are also prone to various difficulties and challenges in their

profession that may compromise their well-being and influence the quality of teaching and learning. To maintain a commitment to and effectiveness in the profession, teachers also need to develop teacher resilience which also contributes to shaping learner resilience (Gu & Day, 2007, 2013). A conceptualisation of teacher resilience in the context of English teaching and learning in Vietnam would provide insights into the relationship between teacher resilience and learner resilience and how these two constructs inter-relate, boost and maybe compensate for each other.

8.5. Concluding remarks

This research tapped into a concept that has not been much explored in the field of second language acquisition. It provides a new understanding of the concept in second/foreign language learning and contributes to confirming the significance of resilience in the educational environment. More importantly, the research has introduced foreign language learner resilience, as a new concept, to the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam. Although the research was contextually confined to a university in a Vietnamese Central Highlands province and further inquiries into this concept are needed for the betterment of English language education in Vietnam, it has provided an in-depth description of contextual and individual factors, potentially both compromising and enabling English language learning at the university level in Vietnam. In essence, this research has shed light on the phenomenon of sustaining and succeeding in foreign language learning despite difficulties and challenges in the Vietnamese context of English education.

Regardless of the substantial knowledge and research skills obtained throughout the research project, conducting this research has offered me the opportunity to reflect on my role as an English language teacher, a learner, a researcher, and a person.

Researching resilience has provided me insights into the risk and protective factors in learning English as a foreign language at the university level in Vietnam. With such an understanding, I have realised the shortcomings in my teaching practice. I knew so little about my students that I tended to forget that teaching is also inspiring. Students do not always come to class with the readiness to learn, and learning can only happen when students are free from negative emotions, motivated and responsible for their own learning. From a relational perspective on learners' individual factors conducive to learning, I have learned that motivation, autonomy, and agency, perseverance and optimism as key aspects of resilience, are not individualistic but linked closely with each other and with contexts. They fluctuate, as students shift their identities across the

learning process. In addition to their learner identity, their identities as, for example, a member of a disrupted family or a person from a low socio-economic community are likely to generate anxiety or nervousness or lack of motivation that constrain their learning. Therefore, teachers also need to be a resource for students to capitalise on, especially, in the face of challenges and difficulties. Once students' individual factors such as motivation, positive emotions, agency and autonomy are enhanced, resilience is fostered. As a consequence, learning is likely to be maximised.

Adopting CDST as a theoretical framework for this study has shaped my systems thinking and developed my critical arguments for a qualitative approach to researching foreign language learner resilience. I have come to the understanding that second/foreign language learning is a complex dynamic system composed of multiple factors, seen as subsystems, interacting with each other over time in a non-linear manner. The learner is always the main agent who generates the system of foreign language learning. Therefore, success in learning a foreign language necessitates a holistic and temporal view and cannot be explained by singling out individual factors for investigation because all factors are interconnected.

Researching resilience from the perspective of CDST has enabled me to reflect on my life events and learn more about myself as I realise how the concept of resilience and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory apply to me. While a perspective on resilience allows me to see two opposing facets (adversity and opportunity) of what has happened in my life, a complexity perspective enables me to see myself as a person in contexts, link my life events together and explain why I am who I am today. Remarkably, when it comes to the fact that the whole world has shifted to "a new normal" to cope with the most unprecedented situation caused by COVID-19, this research has become more significant to me in that my conceptualisation of resilience as a complex dynamic system is attested to by how the world has self-organised to stability after contingency. This self-organisation would not have happened without the multiple interactions of human beings as main agents of the world system. Again, I, as a subcomponent in the system, co-adapt with others to bounce back from adversity emerging throughout this period.

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APPENDIX A: Information letter for administrators

To:

- Rector of the university
- Director of Scientific Research Management and International Relations
- Dean of Faculty of Foreign Languages

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

[Date]

Dear _____

My name is Hoang Khanh Bao. I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I am conducting a research project on foreign language education at the university level as a requirement of my doctoral degree. The research will involve the participation of teachers and students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages.

Purpose of the research

My research project aims to bring to the fore and conceptualise more clearly resilience in foreign language learning. Particularly, it aims to explore the components of resilience in the context of English language education at the university level in Vietnam. It focuses on identifying the challenges (*risk factors*) English language learners at the university level in Vietnam may be exposed to during their language learning, the factors that help them sustain or succeed in learning English (*protective factors*) being influenced by the risk factors. The study also aims to discover the resilient responses that Vietnamese English language learners might demonstrate. It is expected that the findings of the research will help make a significant contribution to English language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam.

Data collection procedure

There are three stages in data collection:

Stage 1: Focus group discussions with teachers

It is expected that around 8 to 12 teachers will participate in 2 group interviews which will take no longer than one hour and a half each. During the discussions, the teachers will be asked to

share their ideas about the typical resilient language learners drawing on their teaching experiences.

Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews with students

Students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages will participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews which will take no more than one hour. The purpose of the interviews is to find information contributing to building a picture of prototypical resilient language learners. It is also expected that the semi-structured interviews will help identify the factors that hinder and contribute to the foreign learning process and the demonstration of resilient behaviours of foreign language learners at university level in Vietnam.

As soon as I have your approval to conduct my research in the institution, I will contact the administrators in the Faculty of Foreign Languages for the name lists of the students and their email addresses. I will send emails to the students with attachments of the information letters and consent forms.

Stage 3: Questionnaire

Two cohorts of English majors (first-year and fourth-year), which might include approximately 200 students, will take part in a questionnaire voluntarily. I will send an email to all students in these year groups. As I will use Google form to design the questionnaire, the email will include the link to the electronic questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to test the applicability of the prototypes identified in Stages 1 and 2 and their factors of resilience in the broader context of foreign language learning at the university level in Vietnam. It is also expected that the data from the questionnaire will help me identify the extent to which students of different year groups demonstrate their resilience in language learning in the context of foreign language learning at the university level in Vietnam

Confidentiality

The identities of the teachers and students participating in this research will be safeguarded. For the sake of anonymity, the participants will be assigned pseudonyms in coding data and reporting findings of the research. The information collected will only be used for the purpose of the research. The findings will be published in my doctoral thesis, academic publications, and presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences.

I would be very grateful if you could grant me permission to approach the teachers and students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages both via their email addresses and face-to-face contact and undertake the research project. Should you wish to discuss any issues relating to the research project, please contact me or my Chief Supervisor via email or the telephone numbers below.

Kind regards,

Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate

My contact details:

Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate

Phone: (+64) 22 626 1359 (New Zealand)

(+84) 903 519 558 (Vietnam)

Email: khanhbaohoang@gmail.com or bkh10@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact details of my Chief supervisor:

Associate Professor Dr. Margaret Franken
Research Associate
Faculty of Education
Private Bag 3104
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: franken@waikato.ac.nz or margaret.franken@waikato.ac.nz
Phone: (+64) (07)838 4500 ext 6360/021 532292

I, _____, hereby agree to grant Mr. Hoang Khanh Bao permission to undertake research study in the Faculty of Foreign Languages as described above.

Signature

APPENDIX B: Information letter and consent form for teachers

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

[Date]

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Hoang Khanh Bao. I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I am conducting a research project on foreign language education at the university level as a requirement of my doctoral degree. My research study aims to conceptualise the construct of resilience in foreign language learning for which I have adopted the following definition:

> *Foreign language resilience is a developmental process that a successful language learner might undergo when learning a language despite being influenced by both internal and external factors.*

The research will need your participation as experienced foreign language teachers. Your shared ideas and experiences will surely help me complete the study which will hopefully make a contribution to the improvement of English language teaching and learning at the university level in the Vietnamese context.

Purpose of the research

My research project aims to bring to the fore and conceptualise more clearly resilience in foreign language learning. Particularly, it aims to explore the components of resilience in the context of English language education at the university level in Vietnam. It focuses on identifying the challenges (*risk factors*) English language learners at the university level in Vietnam may be exposed to during their language learning, the factors that help them sustain or succeed in learning English (*protective factors*) being influenced by the risk factors. The study also aims to discover the resilient responses that Vietnamese English language learners might demonstrate. It is expected that the findings of the research will help make a significant contribution to English language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam.

Data collection procedure

There are three stages in data collection:

Stage 1: Focus group discussions with teachers

It is expected that around 8 to 12 teachers will be invited to participate in 2 group interviews which will take no longer than one hour and a half each. During the discussions, the teachers will be asked to share their ideas about the typical resilient language learners drawing on their teaching experiences.

Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews with students

Students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages will be invited to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews that will take no more than one hour. The purpose of the interviews is to find information contributing to building a picture of prototypical resilient language learners. It is also expected that the semi-structured interviews will help identify the factors that hinder and contribute to the foreign learning process and the demonstration of resilient behaviours of foreign language learners at the university level in Vietnam.

Stage 3: Questionnaire

Two cohorts of English majors (first-year and fourth-year), which might include approximately 200 students, will be invited to take part in a questionnaire voluntarily. The purpose of the questionnaire is to test the applicability of the prototypes and their factors of resilience in the broader context of foreign language learning at the university level in Vietnam. It is also expected that the data from the questionnaire will help me identify the extent to which students of different year groups demonstrate their resilience in language learning in the context of foreign language learning at the university level in Vietnam.

You are being asked to contribute to Stage 1 only.

However, I will give you ongoing information about the project in the form of the interview schedule and the questionnaire if you have any further insights to contribute.

Confidentiality

Your identities will be safeguarded. Pseudonyms will be used in coding data and reporting the findings of the research. The information collected will only be used for the purpose of the research. You will receive a summary of the transcript of **the** focus group interview for information purposes only. I ask that you do not share the content of the focus group so that it remains confidential. The findings will be published in my doctoral thesis, academic publications, and presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences. You will also be able to access the electronic copy of my thesis on the website of the University of Waikato once it is completed, submitted and approved by the University of Waikato.

As suggested from the purpose of my study and the methodology I chose to conduct, I would appreciate the participation of teachers who have at least 5 years of teaching experience and thus have taught a wide range of students of different learning styles.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You will be able to withdraw from the research project at any time and/or withdraw the information you supplied up until the commencement of data analysis. In case you want to withdraw the data provided, please inform me via email.

Please read and complete the attached consent form if you are willing to be a participant.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. Should you have any further queries relevant to the research, please contact me or my Chief Supervisor via email or the telephone numbers given below.

Kind regards,

Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate

My contact details:

Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate

Phone: (+64) 22 626 1359 (New Zealand)

(+84) 903 519 558 (Vietnam)

Email: khanhbaohoang@gmail.com or

bkh10@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact details of my Chief supervisor:

Associate Professor Dr. Margaret Franken
Research Associate
Faculty of Education
Private Bag 3104
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: franken@waikato.ac.nz or
margaret.franken@waikato.ac.nz
Phone: (+64) (07)838 4500 ext 6360/021 532292

CONSENT FORM

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group discussion. As per the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related activities regulations 2008, it is suggested that you read this consent form carefully, tick in the boxes (☑) and sign to indicate your consent to participate in this study.

☐ I have read and understood the details about the research project in the information letter.

☐ I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this research project.

☐ I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary, which means I have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time and/or withdraw the information I supplied up until the commencement of data analysis.

☐ I have been informed and understand that the information I provide will be used for the purpose of this research study, including the publication of a doctoral thesis at the University of Waikato, presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences and other academic publications.

☐ I have been informed and understand that my identity and the information I provide will be safeguarded and kept confidential.

Focus group non-disclosure statement

☐ I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and the researcher during the focus group discussion. I undertake that no information will be disclosed or shared outside the group.

Declaration by participant

I hereby consent to take part in this research study

PARTICIPANT'S FULL NAME:_____

SIGNATURE:_____DATE:_____

APPENDIX C: Information letter and consent form for students

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

[Date]

Dear Students,

Are you a student who has experienced difficulties/challenges in learning English and managed to overcome those?

Do you think that your English is improving, and/or you are more engaged in learning the language?

If your answer to the above questions is "**YES**", you might be interested in participating in my research project.

My name is Hoang Khanh Bao. I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I am conducting a research project on foreign language education at the university level as a requirement of my doctoral degree. The research will need your participation as models of resilient language learners. Your shared ideas and experiences will surely help me complete the study which will hopefully contribute to the improvement of English language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam.

Purpose of the research

My research project aims to conceptualize resilience in foreign language learning. Particularly, it aims to explore the components of resilience in the context of English language education at the university level in Vietnam. My research will focus on understanding:

- the difficulties/challenges that you may face in learning the language,
- the factors that help you go on and improve in learning English despite difficulties/challenges, and
- the behaviours that you demonstrate as resilient English language learners.

I expect that the findings of the research will help make a significant contribution to English language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam.

Data collection procedure

Data collection includes three stages:

Stage 1: Focus group discussions with teachers who will share their ideas about the typical resilient language learners drawing on their teaching experiences;

Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews with students, which will help identify the factors that hinder and contribute to the foreign learning process and the demonstration of resilient behaviours of foreign language learners at the university level in Vietnam.

Stage 3: A questionnaire which will be administered to approximately 200 first-year and fourth-year English majors.

You are invited to participate in the second stage of data collection.

Confidentiality

I will keep your identities safeguarded by using pseudonyms in coding data and reporting findings of the research. I will use the information collected for the purpose of the research. The findings will be published in my doctoral thesis, academic publications, and presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences. You will also be able to access the electronic copy of my thesis on the website of the University of Waikato once my research report is completed, submitted and approved by the University of Waikato.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You will be able to withdraw from the research project at any time and/or withdraw the information you supplied up until I begin data analysis. In case you want to withdraw the data provided, please inform me via email.

Please read and complete the attached consent form if you are willing to be a participant.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you have any further queries relevant to the research, please contact me or my Chief Supervisor via email or telephone numbers given below.

Kind regards,

Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate

My contact details:
Hoang Khanh Bao, PhD Candidate
Phone: (+64) 22 626 1359 (New Zealand)
(+84) 903 519 558 (Vietnam)
Email: khanhbaohoang@gmail.com or
bkh10@students.waikato.ac.nz

Contact details of my Chief supervisor:

Associate Professor Dr. Margaret Franken
Research Associate
Faculty of Education
Private Bag 3104
Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: franken@waikato.ac.nz or
margaret.franken@waikato.ac.nz
Phone: (+64) (07)838 4500 ext 6360/021 532292

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. As per the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related activities regulations 2008, please read this consent form carefully, tick in the boxes (☑) and sign to indicate your consent to participate in this study.

☐ I have read and understood the details about the research project in the information letter.

☐ I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this research project.

☐ I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary, which means I have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time and/or withdraw the information I supplied up until the start of data analysis.

☐ I have been informed and understand that the information I provide will be used for the purpose of this research study, including the publication of a doctoral thesis at the University of Waikato, presentations at workshops, seminars or conferences and other academic publications.

☐ I have been informed and understand that my identity and the information I provide will be safeguarded and kept confidential.

Declaration by participant

I hereby consent to take part in this research study:

PARTICIPANT'S FULL NAME:_____

SIGNATURE:_____DATE:_____

APPENDIX D: Prompt and questions for focus group discussions

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to participate in this discussion. As specified in the information letter, the purpose of this group discussion is to help identify prototypes of resilient language learners in the context of foreign language teaching and learning at the university level in Vietnam. All your ideas and experiences as language teachers are welcomed and appreciated. Please note that there are no wrong answers and feel free to share your viewpoints even if they are different from what others have said. You do not need to agree with others, but it would be polite and respectful if you listen as others share their ideas. As I do not want to miss any of your ideas or comments, I am going to tape-record this discussion. My role will be to moderate/facilitate this discussion. The information in this discussion will remain confidential to the group. I will not use your real names in any stages of data analysis and in the report of findings.

PROMPT AND QUESTIONS

Have you ever met or worked with types of English language learners who seemed to have the ability to withstand challenges/difficulties and make progress in learning English?

If you have met these types of students,

1. What challenges/difficulties did the student have?

   Probe: from the social, educational or familial contexts?
2. What made you think that the student was confronted by challenges/difficulties?

   Probe: attitudes, emotions, or behaviours shown by the student
3. What made you think the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties?

   Probe: attitudes, emotions, or behaviours shown by the student
4. What factors do you think influenced the student during the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?

   Probe: from the social, educational or familial contexts?
5. If you were to think about types of language learners who have the ability to withstand challenges/difficulties, what types would you be able to think of and what would they be like?

APPENDIX E: Possible questions for semi-structured interviews with students

Project: RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM

QUESTIONS

1. What challenges have you encountered during your experience as an English language learner?

   Probe: from the social, educational or familial contexts?

2. How do you think these challenges have affected your language learning?
3. What made you feel like going on with your language learning when facing the challenges?

   Probe: from the social, educational or familial contexts?

4. What did you feel/think when you were affected by the challenges?
5. What did you do to overcome the challenges?
6. In terms of your response to challenges in your language learning experience, do you think of yourself as a typical language learner? What in your view makes you typical or atypical? Do you think other learners are like you in this respect?

APPENDIX F: Procedure for piloting focus group discussion

A. PLANNING

- Contact teachers (Vietnamese PhD students) to ask for their availability (Via phone, emails, in person)
- Send the information letter to participants to ponder the topic to be discussed and the translated versions of the letter and the consent form for proofreading
- Check agreement on time and venue for the group discussion
- Arrange logistics (recording device, snack and drink)
- Double check questions for the group discussion

B. PRE-DISCUSSION

- Welcome the participants; introduce the researcher and assistant (if available) and re-introduce the research topic and the purpose of the research project.
- Advise the participants of the ground rules including:
    - Duration of the discussion
    - Conversational atmosphere (no right/wrong answers)
    - Turn taking (one speaker at a time)
    - Respect for other people's ideas/viewpoints
    - Silent mode setting for mobiles

C. DISCUSSION

Categories of questions	Questions	Prompts	Notes
Opening	Could you tell us your name, how long you have been teaching and what you are teaching?		
Introduction	From your teaching experience, what challenges/difficulties do you think Vietnamese students may encounter over the course of their time learning English?		
Transition	Recalling the classes you have taught in the last few years, can you estimate the percentage of students per class who were able to make progress or succeed in learning English?		
Key	Will you share with us an example of a student that you remember as the one who seemed to be able to overcome difficulties/challenges and make progress in learning English? What challenges/difficulties do you think the student had at that time? What made you think that the student was confronted by challenges/difficulties?	Was there anything special about the student that drew your attention? *Can you tell where the challenges/difficulties were possibly from? How did you know that the student was having difficulties/challenges? What signified to you that the student was having difficulties/challenges? Was there anything*	

	What made you think that the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? What factors do you think influenced the student during the course of overcoming difficulties/challenges?	*you noticed in terms of his/her attitudes/emotions and/or behaviours?* *How did you know that the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? Was there anything you noticed about his/her attitudes/emotions/behaviours?* *How do you think the student (was able) managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? Were there any resources from both inside and outside classroom environment you might think as the advantage taken by the student in the course of overcoming difficulties/challenges*	
Ending	If you were to think about the types of language learners who are able to overcome challenges/difficulties, what types would you be able to think of and what would they be like? (To be asked after summarising the discussion) *Does the summary capture everything that has been said?* *Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't?*	*(Drawing on the examples we have discussed, what labels would you give to these types of students? What are their typical characteristics? Are there any 'types' that haven't been covered in our discussion so far?*	

APPENDIX G: Focus group protocol matrix

No.	Focus group Questions *(and prompting)*	Opening Introduction Transition	What do resilient students look like? (Prototypes-Attractor states of resilience in English foreign language learning)	What individual learner/interactional/contextual factors do Vietnamese tertiary learners of English perceive as limiting their ability to be resilient? (Risk factors)			What individual learner/interactional/contextual factors do Vietnamese tertiary learners of English perceive as enabling their ability to be resilient? (Protective factors)			What kind of resilient responses (behaviours, emotions, attitudes, etc.) do learners report making to challenges? (Interaction between factors)	Closing
				Individual	Interactional	Contextual	Individual	Interactional	Contextual		
1	Could you tell us your name, how long you have been teaching and what you are teaching?	X									
2	From your teaching experience, what challenges/difficulties do you think Vietnamese students may encounter over the course of their time learning English?	X									
3	Recalling the classes you have taught in the last few years, can you estimate the percentage of students per class who were able to make progress or succeed in learning English?	X									
4	Will you share with us an example of a student that you remember as the one who seemed to be able to overcome difficulties/challenges and make progress in learning English?		X								

5	Was there anything special about the student that drew your attention?		X							X	
6	What challenges/difficulties do you think the student had at that time? *(Can you tell where the challenges/difficulties were possibly from?)*					X					
7	What made you think that the student was confronted by challenges/difficulties? *(How did you know that the student was having difficulties/challenges? What signified to you that the student was having difficulties/challenges? Was there anything you noticed in terms of his/her attitudes/emotions and/or behaviours?)*			X	X	X					
8	What made you think that the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? *(How did you know that the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? Was there anything you noticed about his/her attitudes/emotions/behaviours?)*						X	X			
9	What factors do you think influenced the student during the course of overcoming difficulties/challenges? *(How do you think the student (was able)*								X		

	managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? Were there any resources from both inside and outside classroom environment you might think as the advantage taken by the student in the course of overcoming difficulties/challenges)										
10	If you were to think about the types of language learners who are able to overcome challenges/difficulties, what types would you be able to think of and what would they be like? *(Drawing on the examples we have discussed, what labels would you give to these types of students? What are their typical characteristics? Are there any 'types' that haven't been covered in our discussion so far?)*		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11	(To be asked after summarising the discussion) *Does the summary capture everything that has been said?* *Is there anything that we should have talked about but didn't?*										X

APPENDIX H: Fieldnotes form

No.	Questions / Participants	Opening Intro. Transition	Interview question 4	Interview question 5	Interview questions 6+7	Interview question 8+9	Interview question 10
			RQ1	RQ1+1c	RQ1a	RQ1b	RQ1(abc)
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

APPENDIX I: Focus group participants' profiles and summary of main points from their data

FOCUS GROUP 1
DATE 15/8/2018
DURATION: 1 HOUR 15 MINUTES
Moderator: Hoang, Khanh Bao
Participants: 5

Interview question 1: Participants' profiles:

No.	Teacher participants	Experience	Subjects in charge
1	Y	8 years	Reading comprehension General English
2	Hoang	26 years	Language skills and Linguistics
3	Tuong	20 years	Phonetics, Translation Speaking skills
4	Ngoc	7 years	General English/Listening skill
5	Doan	5 years	Speaking skill/ General English

Learners (Pseudonyms)	**Difficulties/challenges**	**Protective factors/behaviours**	**Types**
Nam	English learning background: - Low level of English proficiency	- Not discouraged by failure, keep trying despite negative results - Proactive in classroom activities - Seek help from teachers - Always look for learning resources	Failure resistance (Classified by positive attitude toward learning)
Xuan	Social & Familial background: - Study English in the 1990s in Vietnam (little access to learning resources) - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Live in a poor family - Start school late	- Strong desire to achieve success in life. - Always urged/self-motivated by friends' achievements (Want to be as good as friends)	Self-determination (Classified based on the background)
Hang	New learning environment - Forced by parents to study in their favourite university - Shocked by the pressure from a new learning environment	- Look for and make use of different types of learning resources especially from the internet (Chat and make friends with foreigners on - Maintain relationship and connection with friends in the previous university	Passion driven (Classified based on psychological factors – shocked/stressed leading to drop-out)

	- Quit studying English as a major	- Seek help from teachers	
Hoai	Social & Familial background: - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Live in a poor family Individual problem: - Strong dialect accent - Low level of proficiency	Self-initiate learning Talk to teacher	Self-determination (Classified based on the background)
Tuyen	Social & Familial background: - Study English in the 1990s in Vietnam (little access to learning resources) - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Live in a poor family Individual problem: - Strong dialect accent - Low level of proficiency	- Seek help from teachers - Proactive in learning activities - Take initiative in finding learning resources	Self-determination (Classified based on the background)

FOCUS GROUP 2
DATE 17/8/2018
DURATION: 46 MINUTES

Moderator: Hoang, Khanh Bao
Participants: 5

Participants' profiles:

No.	Teacher participants (pseudonyms)	Experience	Subjects in charge
1	Hien	20 years	Language skills: reading and listening
2	Le	24 years	Grammar, syntax, writing, teaching methods
3	Ho	21 years	Writing skill, cross-culture analysis, speaking
4	Thanh	Over 2 years	General English/speaking skill
5	Tran	5 years	Writing skill/ Research methodology/ British culture

Learners (pseudonyms)	**Difficulties/challenges**	**Protective factors/behaviours**	**Types**
Tien	Familial background: - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Born into a poor farmer family with many children English learning background: - Low level of English proficiency Individual problem: - Dialect accent causing difficulties for others to understand - Accent affects English pronunciation	-Awareness of the disadvantages. - Desire to identify self in society. - Take advantage of any opportunity to practice English (including teachers and foreigners) - Proactive in classroom activities - Seek help from teachers and other resources - Careful and detailed person	Self-determination (Classified based on background)
Quoc	Familial background: - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Born into a poor family English learning background: - Low level of English proficiency - Chose to study English as a major after a year studying Biology at another university	-Always seek help from teachers - Desire to find a scholarship to study abroad - Always fulfil tasks assigned properly - Willing to share knowledge and learning resources with friends and teachers	Self-determination (Classified based on the background)
Hoa	Familial background: - Live with mum	- Change behaviours in the second year after being	Strong personality

	Individual problem: - Eccentric behaviours: sitting in a corner away from friends in the classroom, not greeting teachers unless being greeted first (considered as disrespect in Vietnamese culture), sometimes stand up all in a sudden in the classroom expressing/sharing/stating views while others are focusing on other activities other than speaking. - No particular interest except for watching foreign movies with subtitle.	assigned the position of class monitor - Proactive in all activities in and outside the classroom - Willing to help friends. One of the factors that help this student change his behaviours is the encouragement from teachers and friends (one of the teachers' comments) Love to receive compliments from teachers (Become more friendly when being cared about and encouraged by teachers)	(Classified based on individual problem/behaviours)
Trung	Individual problem: - Dropped out from studying Biology after 2 years and chose to study English as a major - Inferiority complex (lack of covert self-esteem): ashamed by the feeling of going to graduate from university later than friends of the same age, public profile on Facebook shows that he is now doing his final year at university	- Strong desire for English because of the love of tourism -Focused on studying - Enroll in some courses for students of upper year - Wish to finish university soon - Relatively helpful to friends	Lack of self-esteem
Hau	English learning background: - Poor English proficiency	- Passion for language learning. - Good attitude toward language learning (stay focused in the classroom). - Seek help from teachers and other learning resources - Spend more time studying at home.	Passion driven

FOCUS GROUP 3
DATE 17/8/2018
DURATION: 54 MINUTES

Moderator: Hoang, Khanh Bao
Participants: 3
Participants' profiles:

No.	Teacher participants (Pseudonyms)	Experience	Subjects in charge
1	Kim	20 years	Language skills: writing, translation, etymology
2	Thi	19 years	Language skill: listening, ESP, British/American Culture
3	Tong	15 years	Language skill: speaking, Interpretation, sociolinguistics

Learners (Pseudonyms)	**Difficulties/challenges**	**Protective factors/behaviours**	**Types**
Chau	English learning background: - Have never learned English before. Very low level of proficiency Individual problem: - Anxious and worried about not being able to complete the extensive English course	- Self awareness of the disadvantages. - Seek help from teachers - Take initiative in facilitating learning (chose to seat in the front row to seek help from teacher more easily)	Self-initiative (Classified by teachers based on protective factors)
Hoai	Familial background: - Live in a remote and disadvantaged area - Born into a poor family - Ethnic minority English learning background: - Low level of English proficiency Individual problem: - Emotional - Inferiority complex (Feeling inferior to others in terms of family background and English knowledge and skills) - Vietnamese is not the mother tongue, which leads to difficulties in understanding teachers' explanation and in learning English	- Talk to teachers about difficulties. - Encouragement from teachers and friends - Find assistance from friends (study in groups with better students)	Encouragement triggered (Classified by teachers based on protective factors)
Tuan	English learning background: - Did not learn English in high school -	- Encouragement from teacher - Hard-working - Motivated by ongoing assessment	Encouragement and assessment triggered (Classified by teachers based on protective factors)

APPENDIX J: Focus group participants' profiles and transcript sample

FOCUS GROUP 1 TRANSCRIPT

DATE 15/8/2018

DURATION: 1 HOUR 15 MINUTES

Moderator: Hoang, Khanh Bao

Participants: 5

Interview question 1: Participants' profiles:

No.	Teacher participants	Experience	Subjects teaching
1	Y	8 years	Reading comprehension General English
2	Hoang	26 years	Language skills and Linguistics
3	Tuong	20 years	Phonetics, Translation, Speaking skills
4	Ngoc	7 years	General English/Listening skill
5	Doan	5 years	Speaking skill/ General English

Interview question 2: From your experience, what challenges/difficulties do you think Vietnamese students may encounter over the course of their time learning English?

Hoang: Khó khăn lớn nhất của sinh viên hiện nay là cơ hội để thực hành. Tức là học ở trường nhưng cơ hội thực hành rất là ít. Vì tiếng Anh là foreign language nên thời gian các em thực hành tiếng chủ yếu là trên lớp. Về phía mỗi sinh viên, ví dụ trong một lớp, có những em có cơ hội, nhiều điều kiện để tự học, nhưng ví dụ như khi mình hướng dẫn chuyên đề, khóa luận, có em không có máy tính để làm chuyên đề. Tức là về điều kiện cơ sở vật chất của cá nhân đôi khi bị hạn chế. Để hiểu sâu hơn, mình nghĩ là cần có điều tra cụ thể.

[English] One of the biggest difficulties that our students are facing is the opportunity to practise their language skills. They have few opportunities to practise English. Mostly, they can only practise language skills during class time. With respect to the students' self-learning capacity, it sometimes depends on the facilities and devices that are available to individual student. Some of the students do not possess personal computer, which may impede their self-learning. I think it would be better if we could conduct a survey to be able to find out more detailed information about this.

Tuong: Mình nghĩ tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh thuộc hai hệ ngôn ngữ khác nhau do đó sự ảnh hưởng của tiếng mẹ đẻ là một rào cản lớn đối với sinh viên về mặt phát âm và thực hành các kỹ năng khác

[English] I think English and Vietnamese are of two different language systems and English language students can be influenced by their mother tongue which hinders their pronunciation as well as other language skills

Y: Từ góc độ kinh nghiệm của em, em thấy một trong những cái khó khăn đó là số lượng sinh viên trên mỗi lớp học quá đông làm cho giáo viên khó có thể kiểm soát được…không thể triển khai phương pháp phù hợp như mong muốn.

[English] From my experience, I can say that the big class size makes it difficult for the teacher to manage and deploy the teaching methods as effectively as they wish.

Tuong: Nói là phương pháp giao tiếp nhưng một lớp 70 sinh viên thì làm sao có thể triển khai được.

[English] It is impossible for the teacher to employ the communicative approach in a class of 70 students.

Ngoc: Ý kiến của em cũng khá giống với cô Hoang, bởi vì em đang muốn nói đến cái động lực của sinh viên. Bởi vì nếu như họ (sinh viên) được sử dụng tiếng sau khi ra trường, họ sử dụng tiếng Anh để làm việc thì chắc chắn họ sẽ có động cơ tốt hơn chứ còn học để ra trường, sau đó không dùng thì cũng chỉ là đối phó.

[English] I have the same idea as Ms Hoang. I mean the students' motives. If the students use the language to communicate in their working environment after they graduate, they will surely be motivated to learn the language, otherwise, they learn the language just because they have to in order to be able to graduate.

Doan: Một yếu tố khác em nghĩ có thể có đó là từ gia đình. Em có từng được nghe về một trường hợp một bạn sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh mình. Nghĩa là, mong muốn của bạn là được học ở một môi trường khác, tốt hơn, bạn ấy nghĩ là môi trướng ấy sẽ giúp bạn phát triển tốt hơn, nhưng vì lý do gia đình mà bạn phải chọn một môi trường học tập khác. Em nghĩ gia đình cũng có yếu tố tạo nên khó khăn nhất định đối với sinh viên.

[English] I think the family could be a factor affecting the students, too. I once heard about a student majoring in English who wanted to study in an environment where she thought it would be better for her to develop, but for some reasons, she had to study in another environment as her family (parents) wanted her to. The family could possibly become an impediment to the student's learning process.

Interview question 3: Recalling the classes you have taught in the last few years, can you estimate the percentage of students per class who were able to make progress or succeed in learning English, given the challenges/difficulties mentioned earlier?

Tuong: Khoảng 60-70% là có thể duy trì đối với việc học tiếng Anh, còn nếu nói có tiến bộ thì khoảng 30-40%. Số mà duy trì được việc học đó thì chưa chắc có tiến bộ. Một số em học xong ra trường chỉ muốn bán hàng online.

[English] Around 60-70% of the students are able to sustain their language learning, yet they might not improve in learning English. I think only 30-40% of them are able to make progress in their language learning. Some students even think about doing online business after graduating (instead of doing something relevant to their BA degree in English language)

Hoang: Nhiều em thì cứ học làm sao để ra trường thôi, còn đến khi ra trường rồi thì tính làm việc khác. Mục tiêu là tốt nghiệp đại học.

[English] Many of the students try to be able to graduate from the university as soon as possible. Their common goal is to get the degree regardless of whether they can find a job relevant to their degrees or not

Y: Khoảng 60-70% là duy trì, 20 – 30%% là phát triển tốt

[English] About 60-70% of the students can sustain their learning, but only 20-30% can really make progress in their language learning.

Ngọc: Em ngĩ tỉ lệ này có khác biệt lớn giữa sinh viên chuyên ngữ và không chuyên ngữ. Sinh viên không chuyên tầm 20% là tối đa.

[English] I think there is a big difference between English-majored students and non-majored students. For those who are not studying English as a major, there are only about 20% to the maximum can sustain and make progress in their language learning.

Doan: Em cũng nghĩ độ tầm 20%.

[English] I also think that the percentage is only about 20%.

Interview question 4&5: Will you share with us an example of a student that you remember as the one who seemed to be able to overcome difficulties/challenges and make progress in learning English? Was there anything special about the student that drew your attention?

Tuong: Hồi xưa mình có dạy một em tên Hoai. Em này là một điển hình của việc vượt qua nghịch cảnh. Bạn Hoài nàylà một trong số những giáo viên xuất sắc được British Council chọn đi đào tạo nâng cao về phương pháp giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Em ấy sống ở một huyện rất xa xôi. Điều đặc biệt của em này là em ấy tiến bộ rất nhanh khi mới vào em ngơ ngác, nói tiếng Anh với chất giọng địa phương, sai ngữ pháp.

[English] I still remember a student named Hoai who might be considered as a typical resilient language learner. She was one of the best teachers selected by the British Council to attend a professional development course for English language teachers. As far as I can recall, she came from a far and remote area and her proficiency level of English was very low. Her English pronunciation was influenced by her dialect accent and she committed a lot of grammatical mistakes in speaking English

Doan: Em có một ví dụ nhưng mà bạn sinh viên này là sinh viên không chuyên. Bạn này từng đậu chuyên ngành tiếng Anh ở Đại học Đà Nẵng. Bạn học ở đó một kỳ, nhưng khối lượng học tập quá lớn với bạn, làm bạn áp lực nên bạn bỏ học. Sau đó bạn về trường Đại học Tây Nguyên thi vào ngành Quản trị kinh doanh. Bạn nói sau khi bạn quay trở lại thì bạn vẫn sử dụng tất cả những khả năng bạn có để tiếp tục học tiếng Anh.

[English] I once taught a non-English-major student who used to study English as a major at another university (Da Nang University). She quit studying there after a semester because she felt stressed and overwhelmed by the learning requirements of the course. She, then, enrolled in a Business Management course at Tay Nguyen University. She said she continued to learn English after she quit studying English as a major.

Ngoc: Em cũng có một ví dụ, nhưng cũng chưa thấy hiệu quả rõ rệt lắm nhưng cơ bản bạn ấy cũng cố gắng vượt qua bản thân. Bạn ấy tên Nam học lớp Thú Y K13.Bạn tìm mọi cách để nâng cao khả năng

tiếng Anh của mình nhưng mà …có hiệu quả lên một chút nhưng không phải nổi bật như hai trường hợp vừa nêu. Năm vừa rồi có đậu kỳ thi B1 để ra trường.

[English] I also came to know a student. I cannot tell exactly if it was effective or not, but to a certain extent, he had tried his best to overcome the challenges he had been facing. His name is Nam. He was studying veterinary medicine K13 (Course 13). Although the result was not very remarkable, I think he managed in every way he could to uplift this English level. The result represents through the fact that he passed the English test and was granted the certificate of B1 level of English proficiency (which has been a university requirement for graduation in many universities in Vietnam)

Hoang: Mình đang cố nhớ nhưng lâu lắm không chủ nhiệm. Nhưng nếu nhớ lại từ năm k97 có bạn Tuyen, trước đây cũng là đồng nghiệp với các thầy cô ở đây, giờ dạy ở Đại học Ngoại ngữ Đà Nẵng.

[English] It has been a long time I did not work as an academic advisor, but I can still remember one of my brilliant student – Tuyen, who enrolled in the course in 1997. He used to be one of our colleagues in this university. He is now teaching in Da Nang University of Foreign Languages.

Y: Em có một trường hợp, anh ấy ở Điện Biên. Anh ấy học tiến sĩ ở Úc cùng trường với em. Anh học xong tiến sĩ ngành indigenous education. Nghị lực học của anh ấy rất đáng nể. Anh đó cũng học chuyên Anh.

[English] I happened to know a person who lived in Dien Bien (a mountainous province in the north of Vietnam). He earned his doctoral degree in indigenous studies in Australia. He used to be a talented student who specialized in English language when he was in high school. I admired him a lot because he had been so persevering in studying.

Interview question 6&7: What challenges/difficulties do you think the student was facing? What made you think the student was confronted by challenges/difficulties?

Tuong: Khó khăn của bạn ấy là giống như đã nói ở trên, tức là bạn ở 1 vùng quê xa xôi, chưa có cơ hội tiếp xúc tiếng Anh, không có điều kiện về cơ sở vật chất như máy tính, tự điển hay điện thoại. Rồi còn bị ảnh hưởng bởi tiếng mẹ đẻ, bạn này nói giọng Nghệ An. Lớp mà bạn này học cũng đông khoảng hơn 60 em.

[English] As I said earlier that she (Hoai) lived in a remote area, so she had had little access to learning English before entering university. She also had little access to resources that support her language learning such as computers, dictionaries or smart phones. Additionally, her special dialect accent (Nghe An) was one of the hindrances. Her class had a big class size – about more than 60 students, as far as I can remember.

Doan: Việc bạn ấy bỏ học ở Đại học Đà Nẵng là bởi vì bạn chưa quen với việc học tập ở trường đấy, áp lực bài tập các thầy/cô giao quá lớn với bạn, bạn không vượt qua được nên bạn bỏ học và về học QTKD ở ĐHTN, nhưng đam mê tiếng Anh của bạn vẫn còn. Do bạn chia sẻ về learning history của bạn em biết được những khó khăn của bạn ấy.

[English] She quit Da Nang University because she was not familiar with the new learning environment at the university where she was assigned a big load of assignments by the teachers, which put a lot of pressure on her. Although she enrolled in Business Management at Tay Nguyen University later on, she said to me that she still had great passion for English.

Ngoc: Bạn ấy tiếng Anh không tốt, nói đúng hơn là tệ. Khó khăn của bạn ấy là do nền tảng tiếng Anh không tốt ở phổ thông.

[English] His English level was very low. I think it was because his English language learning at high school did not lay a good foundation for him.

Hoang: Mình nhớ hồi đầu tiên vô bạn trông rất quê mùa. Bạn viết luận, sử dụng từ ngữ khó hiểu, nhưng sau tiến bộ rõ. Khó khăn hồi năm 97 thì rất là nhiều đặc biệt là nguồn tài liệu hầu như không có. Mình phải tìm những bài tập cũ thời mình còn học Đại học ở Huế, xong đi đánh máy lại, rồi giao cho sinh viên làm.

[English] My first impression about him was his rustic appearance. I taught him writing skill and he often use words that made his writing incomprehensible to me. However, it was also clear to me that he was making progress quite quickly. I can tell that in 1997 there were a lot of difficulties, especially shortage of learning resources. I had to find and made photocopies of (retyping) the learning materials/handouts that I collected when I was a student at Hue University for my students to learn with.

Y: Anh ấy bắt đầu đi học khi đã lớn tuổi hơn nhiều so với bạn cùng lớp. Anh đó hay kể hồi xưa anh ở miền quê nên rất khó khăn, nhưng có cái gì đó thôi thúc anh phải học mới thoát được khó khăn. Những khó khăn chủ yếu về cơ sở vật chất, trường học xa, phải đi bộ.

[English] He started his education when he was much older than his classmates. He told me that though he lived in the disadvantaged rural area, there was often something that drove him to study in order to be able to get rid of poverty and difficulties. The difficulties were mostly to deal with the limited resources/facilities. He had to walk long distance from home to school.

Interview question 8&9: What made you think the student managed to overcome the challenges/difficulties? What factors do you think influenced the student during the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?

Tuong: Mình có hỏi em vì sao tiến bộ nhanh như vậy. Em ấy kể là về kỹ năng nói em ấy tự nói tiếng Anh một mình, tự nói với chính bản thân và không cần thực hành tiếng trong nhóm hay với người nước ngoài gì hết. Em còn kể em ấy còn nói chuyện với 1 con thằn lằn trên trần nhà. Rồi tự viết các nhật ký bằng tiếng Anh. Tất cả những thứ em ấy viết trong ngày đều dùng tiếng Anh, chẳng hạn như viết shopping list bằng tiếng Anh. Em tự ép buộc mình học và cuối cùng em đã thành công.

[English] I did ask her (Hoai) about how her English improved so quickly. She told me that she practised her English speaking skill by talking to herself. Sometimes she even spoke to a lizard on the ceiling. She wrote her diary in English. Whatever she wanted to write during a day, she used English. For example, she used English to write her daily shopping list. She forced herself to learn by all means and finally she succeeded.

Doan: Bạn nói sau khi bạn quay trở lại thì bạn vẫn sử dụng tất cả những khả năng bạn có để tiếp tục học tiếng Anh, ví dụ bạn lên mạng, dùng internet. Bạn vẫn tiếp tục duy trì việc học tiếng Anh chứ bạn ấy không bỏ. Bạn ấy học ngành QTKD nhưng vẫn thích học tiếng Anh. Khi về đây học thì học phần tiếng Anh 1 của bạn ấy chỉ đạt 6/10, tức chỉ đạt điểm C thôi. Nhưng sau đấy bạn gặp một giáo viên giúp bạn lấy lại được căn bản và kiểu như inspire bạn ấy. Giáo viên ấy nói chuyện với bạn, hỏi thăm bạn về những khó khăn khi học tiếng Anh. Sau khi nói chuyện với giáo viên thì bạn thấy bạn vẫn còn tình yêu đối với tiếng Anh và bạn ấy bắt đầu lại từ đầu, học lại từ căn bản, xây dựng mục tiêu là thi IELTS.

Lúc nào bạn cũng tìm kiếm cách săn học bổng. Bạn ấy lên các trang của lưu học sinh ở nước ngoài ở nhiều nước khác nhau, ví dụ bạn muốn đi Nhật bạn ấy vào trang của LHS. Gần đây bạn ấy có chia sẻ là có sử dụng SKYPE tìm bạn người nước ngoài để nói chuyện thực hành tiếng Anh. Bạn ấy hát tiếng Anh. Gần đây nhất em được biết là bạn ấy mới tìm được một người bạn trai người Hà Lan, bạn ấy đang làm các thủ tục, học tiếng Hà Lan, thi tiếng Hà Lan để chuẩn bị kết hôn và định cư tại Hà Lan.

Trên lớp, bạn rất chăm chú với việc học. Chuẩn bị bài. Kết quả học tập của bạn kết hợp với việc nói chuyện tiếng Anh với bạn ấy giúp em biết được bạn ấy có tiến bộ.

[English] She (Hang) told me that even when she returned home after one year from the university where she had been studying English at a major and re-enrolled in the Business Management programme at the university in her hometown, she was still interested in learning English. In the first term of the programme, she got 6/10 equivalent to C (just above average) in her end-term English test (English is a compulsory subject for students of all disciplines), but then she met a teacher who helped her recall her English and inspired her to learn it again. That teacher talked to her and asked her about the difficulties that she had been facing in learning English. After talking to the teacher, she found that she was still in love with English and decided to start learning the language from the scratch and set her goal to take the IELTS test.

She was always looking for a scholarship to study abroad. She searched on the websites of the overseas Vietnamese students studying in different countries in the world. She shared with me recently that she has been using Skype to find foreign friends to practice her English speaking skill. She also sings English songs. I happen to know recently that she has found a Dutch partner. She is now learning Dutch and preparing for their marriage. They are going to live in the Netherlands after their marriage.

She really concentrated on her study in class. She was also very well-prepared for the next lesson. Chatting with her in English and looking at her positive results in English learning helped me recognize that she was making progress.

Ngoc: Bạn ấy nói tiếng Anh như kiểu người Việt mới học tiếng Anh. Ngữ pháp lủng củng, nhưng rất hay tìm tòi học hỏi, tìm sách đọc, thường xuyên nói chuyện với giáo viên. Bạn ấy sử dụng Messenger chat với em. Ví dụ có vấn đề gì bạn không hiểu bạn hỏi. Ví dụ như bạn hỏi "em có cuốn sách này cô thấy có hiệu quả hay không?" Nói chung là thường xuyên trao đổi với giáo viên. Bạn ấy cũng rất hay xung phong trả lời nhưng có lúc sai lúc đúng.

[English] He spoke English with lots of grammatical errors just typically like most Vietnamese students at the very early stage of English language learning, but he had a thirst for knowledge. He often looked for books (about English) to read or talked to teachers about his difficulties. He used Messenger to chat with me. For example, he might ask "I have found this book. Do you think it is useful for me?". In general, he consulted the teacher frequently in his learning process. He was also willing to answer questions raised by the teacher during class time, yet his answers to the questions did not get to the point very often.

Hoang: Mình dạy môn viết, trên lớp bạn Tuyên này rất cố gắng, bài viết lúc nào cũng viết nhiều hơn, tức là giao một bài thì viết thành hai hoặc ba bài rồi đưa lên nhờ cô sửa. Lúc đầu là giọng nói cũng rất là khó, phát âm cũng gặp khó khăn do giọng đặc trưng. (**Ngoc:** Anh Tuyên là thuộc kiểu người tự tìm tòi. Có động cơ, động lực không cần ai thúc ép. Có đặt mục tiêu rõ ràng nữa. **Doan**: Anh tự nhận thức được khó khăn bên ngoài như thế nào mới tìm cách cái nào có thể thay đổi được cái nào không và tự tìm lấy nguồn hỗ trợ, môi trường không thay đổi được thì tìm đến thầy cô.)

[English] I taught writing skill. I could say that Tuyen made a lot of efforts in learning. He always completed the writing assignments more than my expectation, that is, he turned in two or three writings and asked for corrective feedback from me while he only needed to do one writing. He also had some problems with his pronunciation because of his strong dialect accent. (**Ngoc added:** Mr. Tuyen is the type of person who is always thirst for knowledge, self-motivated and self-driven without being pushed/urged by anyone. He also has a clear goal to achieve. **Doan added:** He realized his own difficulties and managed to overcome and find the most appropriate solution to each of his problem. If he could not change the contextual difficulties, he would seek support from his teachers.)

Y: Anh luôn có suy nghĩ làm cách nào để tốt hơn, bằng bạn bằng bè. Anh ta có một ý chí luôn muốn đạt được thành công nhất định. Nói chung anh tìm mọi cơ hội để phát triển bản thân.

[English] He always thought about how to make progress and catch up with his friends. He had a strong desire to be successful. In general, he took advantage of every opportunity he could have to improve himself.

Interview question 10: If you were to think about the types of language learners who are able to overcome challenges/difficulties, what types would you be able to think of and what would they be like? (Drawing on the examples of language learners that the participants have talked about)

Ngoc: Như trường hợp bạn Nam mà em nhắc đến thì ngay từ đầu là trình độ tiếng Anh của bạn không tốt và kết quả thường hay tệ. Tức là thường nếu như sinh viên mà gặp kết quả không tốt như vậy thì có những em sẽ buông xuôi và cho là mình bị mất gốc rồi và không học được nữa, nhưng bạn này kết quả vẫn như thế, bạn vẫn tìm mọi cách bạn ấy xoay sở làm sao đó để duy trì như hỏi giáo viên, tìm sách này kia đọc để vượt qua chính mình. Nhưng để đặt tên xúc tích cho trường hợp này thì không biết nên đặt như thế nào.

[English] Normally, many of the students tend to give up trying when they have tried their best to learn the language but still fail to do so because they think they don't have a good foundation and will not be able to learn the language. However, in the case of Nam, for example, while he had a very low level of English and often received unsatisfactory results despite making efforts, he did not give up. He managed to sustain his learning by consulting the teachers and looking for learning resources/materials so that he could be able to rise above himself. Actually, I don't know how to give a proper name for this type of learner.

Tuong: Nhưng ai cũng vậy thôi mà **(Y, Hoang, Dung agreed).** Mình nghĩ nên chia theo có những người vượt qua tâm lý của họ. Còn trường hợp anh ở Điện Biên Phủ thì mình nghĩ là anh ấy vượt qua nghịch cảnh về background của anh. Vậy thì Tuyen cũng có thể nằm ở dạng đó.

[English] It's difficult for all of us here to give names to the types of learners **(Y, Hoang, Dung agreed).** I wonder whether we should classify them in terms of their psychological difficulties and background (contextual) challenges. Just like the one in Dien Bien Phu (friend of **Y**) and Tuyen, they are of the type of learners who were able to overcome their background (contextual) difficulties.

Doan: Trường hợp bạn Hằng của em thì em nghĩ do yếu tố tâm lý. Em nghĩ cái đam mê và sự thích học tiếng Anh của bạn vẫn có nhưng mà ngay tại thời điểm bạn bỏ cuộc đấy bạn không vượt qua được yếu tố tâm lý lúc đấy, tức là sự thích học và duy trì học bị ngắt quãng thôi chứ không stop ngay tại thời điểm bạn từ bỏ việc học ngoại ngữ ở Đà Nẵng. Tại thời điểm ấy sở thích và đam mê của bạn ấy chưa đủ mạnh để vượt qua challenges lúc đấy. Nhưng sau khi bạn vượt qua rồi, bạn về đây thì bạn vẫn nhận ra là bạn vẫn thích, bạn vẫn liên lạc với các bạn học ở Đà Nẵng, vẫn giữ những mối liên hệ đó. Khi biết các bạn đang học cái gì bạn vẫn thích và vẫn chia sẻ nói chuyện với nhau bình thường nên em nghĩ trường hợp này là tâm lý.

[English] In the case of Hang, I think she was affected by her psychological factors. At the time she quit learning English as a major at Da Nang University, her passion for English was still there, but it was not strong enough to help her overcome the challenges and keep her going on with the course at that moment. And as soon as she realized that she was still interested in learning English when she returned home, she took initiative in contacting and maintaining the relationship with her classmates at Da Nang University. She was still interested in what her friends were learning at the university when they shared with her. I think this case is to deal with psychological factors.

Ngoc: Nhưng mình có nên tính là từ lúc bạn bắt đầu đến đây?

[English] Should we count from the beginning since she started her study here (at Tay Nguyen University) in categorizing?

Tương: Nếu như điều kiện thuận lợi mà người đó không chịu học thì người đó bị vướng mắc về tâm lý. Nhưng khi người đó muốn học lắm nhưng do background của họ không cho phép thì lại khác.

[English] If the learning process of a student is hindered while all conditions are still favourable for his/her learning, he/she can be affected by psychological factors. However, when the student really wants to learn, but his/her background is a hindrance, it is a different case.

Doan: Đúng rồi, hai trường hợp này (Tuyen & anh ở Điện Biên) là do background, nhưng em nghĩ Hằng là do yếu tố tâm lý nhiều hơn bởi vì sau khi quay về đây Hằng tận dụng tất cả những thứ Hằng có ví dụ giáo viên rồi mạng internet bạn không stop việc học vì mỗi ngày bạn vẫn nói chuyện với người nước ngoài, vẫn duy trì việc chat với người nước ngoài đến mức bạn người nước ngoài nào willing, bạn chat video luôn, đây là lý do vì sao bạn tìm được người bạn tâm giao và bạn đang hướng đến việc là lập gia đình cùng người đó. Nên em nghĩ bạn bị yếu tố lâm lý ngay tại thời điểm bạn không vượt qua được việc học ngoại ngữ chuyên ngữ. Bạn thi B1 được trên 80 điểm, 82 điểm

[English] That's true. The cases of Mr. Tuyen and the one in Dien Bien Phu can be categorized as students facing challenges due to their background, but for my case, Hang, her language learning was impeded more by her psychological factors because when she returned, she made the most of all affordances available to her such as teachers and/or internet. She did not stop her language learning because she chatted with foreigners online every day. She was willing to make video calls with any foreigner who was also willing to do so with her. This is how she has found her soulmate at present. I think her psychological factors had a great influence on her that disrupted her learning process when she was doing her bachelor degree in English, but she scored over 80, 82 exactly in her (CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) B1 level English test.

Tuong: Cần chia nhỏ đối tượng background, ví dụ như background về mặt xã hội, ví dụ như bạn Hoài thì vừa có tính xã hội vừa có tính physical.

[English] It is necessary to be more specific in terms of the difficulties from the background. For example, Hoai's background can be social and physical (her special accent).

Hoang: Tuyen có phần là individual, vượt qua background về individual với lại social, nhà Tuyen cũng nghèo. Individual là giọng nói với hay nói những cái khó hiểu

[English] For Tuyen, I think his challenges consisted of his social background – his family was poor and individual characteristics – his strong dialect accent and confusing way of expressing ideas that made it difficult for other people to understand him.

Doan: Em nghĩ bạn Hang là vì Background dẫn đến tâm lý. Do khó khăn từ môi trường học tập (learning environment). Bạn Hang này cũng vì bố mẹ bạn muốn bạn học ở môi trường như ở ĐH Đà Nẵng.

[English] I think Hang's difficulties from her background (contextual difficulties) had resulted in the negative psychological factor influencing her learning. Difficulties from the new learning environment. Hang's parents wanted her to study in a higher quality learning environment like Da Nang University.

Bạn Nam sinh viên của Ngoc là bạn vượt qua yếu tố tâm lý. Tức là bạn biết bạn cố nhưng chưa có hiệu quả nhưng bạn ấy vẫn cố tiếp.

[English] For Nam, Ngoc's student, he overcame his own psychological difficulties, that is, even though he knew his effort was not effective, he kept trying.

Ngoc: Có nhiều bạn cố nhưng không hiệu quả và cho rằng mình mất gốc rồi nên bỏ, nhưng bạn này vẫn cố tiếp.

Many of the students put a lot of effort to learn the language, but when they find out that their efforts are ineffective and assume that their basic knowledge of the language is unable to be retrieved, they tend to give up trying. Nam is different

Moderator: Cảm ơn quý thầy/cô đã dành thời gian cho buổi thảo luận hôm nay. Thầy/cô cần bổ sung gì thêm cho thông tin mình vừa cung cấp không? Nếu không bổ sung gì, tôi xin phép dừng buổi thảo luận hôm nay. Tóm tắt nội dung của buổi thảo luận sẽ được gửi đến thầy/cô để xác nhận thông tin thầy/cô đã cung cấp.

[English] Moderator: Thank you for sharing your ideas/information. Would you like to add anything? If you don't have any more information to add, I would like to end the discussion now. The summary of the discussion today will be sent to you for verification.

APPENDIX K: Excerpts from semi-structured interview transcript

Participant: Dai (Pseudonym)

Year: 1 SP K17

Date and time: 14:00 September 17th 2018

Duration: 21 minutes

Social settings

Bao (Interviewer): Could you share with me a bit about where you are from before entering university?

Dai:

Trước khi đi học đại học, em sinh sống và học tập ở huyện Krong Pak từ nhỏ đến giờ. Em sống ở xã cách trung tâm phố huyện khoảng 7-8km.

Bao (Interviewer): What could be considered as difficulties/challenges that hindered your English language learning living in such a place?

Dai:

Nhà khá là xa nên đi học khá vất vả. Quá trình ở cấp 3 thì có một số giáo viên rất giỏi nhưng có một số rất dở.

Thứ nhất là ở đây không có ai muốn học ngoại ngữ. Ai cũng xem thường ngoại ngữ nên muốn luyện tập gì thì gần như chẳng có ai cả.

Bao (Interviewer): In what way do you think these might have affected your language learning?

Dai:

Nó hạn chế ở chỗ là nếu mình cần luyện tập thì chỉ có tự mình luyện tập chứ không có ai luyện tập với mình. Không thể tìm người để lập nhóm, trao đổi chia sẽ kiến thức được.

Familial background

Bao (Interviewer): Could you share with me some information about your family?

Dai:

Gia đình em làm nông, nhà cũng bình thường, không giàu có gì, nhưng bố mẹ em khá là hy sinh. Kiểu như là nổ lực, tạo điều kiện hết cỡ cho mình học. Nhà em chỉ có hai chị em

Bao (Interviewer): How do you think your family background may have played a part in your language learning?

Dai:

Gia đình có tác động tích cực đến việc học tiếng Anh của em hơn là tiêu cực. Gia đình luôn khuyến khích em vì thấy em có năng khiếu. Học cố gắng động viên là chủ yếu chứ không thể giúp đỡ gì nhiều.

Educational background or learning environment

Bao (Interviewer): Think back over the time when you were at school, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges to your language learning in terms of your learning experience? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods)

Dai:

Nói về phương pháp giảng dạy ở cấp 3, ngoại trừ các giáo viên dạy ôn thi học sinh giỏi thì, giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh của em thường khá là tệ, nghĩa là họ dạy khá là tẻ nhạt, theo chương trình máy móc và thường chỉ ưu tiên cho những người có đi học thêm. Trên lớp các giáo viên chỉ dạy theo sách giáo khoa là chính thôi, thậm chí còn bỏ đi các phần như nói và nghe vì họ rằng kỳ thi trung học phổ thông quốc gia không có những bài thi ấy nên không bao giờ dạy và toàn là học sinh phải tự học.

Về cơ sở vật chất thì khó mượn được sách ở thư viện và sách cũng không có nhiều. Sách tiếng Anh gần như không có luôn. Rất khó khăn trong việc đi mượn thêm tài liệu để nâng cao trình độ

Bao (Interviewer): In terms of the learning environment at the university level, what difficulties/challenges do you think you are facing in learning English? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods)

Dai:

Lên đại học thì cũng không khá hơn là mấy vì ở Đại học Tây Nguyên không có quá nhiều tài liệu thêm so với những cái mà em cần. Nghĩa là tài liệu thì nhiều nhưng chỉ phù hợp với những bạn ở trình độ dưới chứ thật ra em đã học khá nhiều nên em cần những tài liệu nâng cao hơn một tí, nhưng gần như không thấy đâu.

Một số giáo viên rất hay, rất có tâm nhưng gần đây đến kỳ vừa rồi thì có những giáo viên dạy rất tệ. Cụ thể là họ phát âm sai rất là nhiều và kiểu họ dạy mà họ mắc rất nhiều lỗi. Bìa giảng của họ thì …thực ra kiểu bài giảng máy móc thì em cũng hiểu được vì kiểu lên đại học rồi thì không thể trông đợi quá nhiều vào giảng viên được. Nhưng việc phát âm sai quá nhiều thì em

chịu không nỗi. Những kỳ trước chưa hề có vấn đề gì nhưng đến học kỳ hiện tại thì rất khó chịu. Kiểu giảng dạy họ cứ chạy vèo vèo, gần như không có thời gian dừng lại cho sinh viên…cứ đi hết cuốn sách, tìm mọi cách để đi cho nhanh hết cuốn sách chứ họ không quan tâm lắm đến chuyện sinh viên có … hiện tại là có hai môn nghe và đọc.

Individual and/or interactional difficulties

Bao (Interviewer): In terms of your interpersonal relationships, including social, familial and educational ones, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges in the process of learning English?

Dai:

Em cảm thấy vấn đề giao tiếp của em không ảnh hưởng gì đến việc học của em.

Bao (Interviewer): How did they affect your language learning? In the face of difficulties/challenges, what kinds of feelings/psychological factors do you think might have limited your language learning?

Dai:

Em cảm giác bực bội, khó chịu. Nhất là kỳ học vừa rồi là cảm giác đến lớp rất là chán. Vừa chán nản vừa bực bội nữa. Chỉ mong cho giờ học kết thúc nhanh để đi về tự học còn hơn.

Behaviours (in response to difficulties)

Bao (Interviewer): In terms of your response to difficulties/challenges, what did you do to overcome them?

Dai:

Về các kỹ năng thì từ hồi cấp 3 đến giờ thì em đều dùng giải pháp là …chẳng hạn như môn đọc, viết với nghe thì em tìm kiếm tài liệu (lậu – nghĩa là không phải mua) ở trên mạng được người ta chụp lại từ sách gốc. Em dùng các tài liệu này in ra rồi làm để cải thiện dần. Còn nghe thì hằng ngày có đầy những video trên mạng mình dành thời gian để nghe. Nó hòa nhập luôn vào trong. Chẳng hạn như đi ngủ em cũng nghe một cái gì đó, trong giờ ăn em cũng ngồi xem. Nghĩa là nó hòa chung vào quá trình sinh hoạt của mình luôn.

Có hai nhóm chính là công nghệ. Em coi nhiều trên các kênh công nghệ nói tiếng Anh chẳng hạn như là Linuxtechtip.com hoặc là có nguồn khác như là TEDTalk hoặc TEDed.

Nói thì em luôn phải tự nói một mình. Mình phải tự phân mình thành hai ba vai. Tự phân vai rồi tự nói. Như em nói là gần như không có ai hứng thú với việc luyện tập với mình hết nên bắt buộc mình tự phân vai, tự nói một mình.

Resources to take advantage

Bao (Interviewer): Who/what could you take advantage of in order to sustain your language learning in response to the challenges/challenges?

Dai:

Ngoài nguồn tài liệu trên mạng thì em mua sách cũ rẻ tiền.

Về người hỗ trợ thì ở cấp 3 có một giáo viên khá là giúp đỡ vì giáo viên đó biết em đang ở đâu và họ sẵn sang hỗ trợ mình hết cỡ. Họ có thể cung cấp thêm tài liệu cho mình. Họ có thể định hướng chứ thực ra họ cũng không có khả năng để giúp em hơn được nữa vì việc học chính là việc của mình. Phấn đấu là việc của mình.

Lên đại học thì em không cảm nhận được sự giúp đỡ nào hết. Ngoài gia đình, chỉ có gia đình. Bạn bè thì cũng không quan tâm gì luôn. Kiểu như giáo viên đại học quá bận rộn, không có thời gian để động viên hay họ có thể nghĩ họ không cần phải làm gì nữa

Individual factors

Bao (Interviewer): What did you think/how did you feel in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?

Dai:

Chẳng hạn như năm ngoái, bước ngoặc lớn là việc em đậu vào đội tuyển quốc gia học sinh giỏi của tỉnh. Cảm giác rất là sung sướng bởi vì kiểu như là nổ lực … từ năm trước đó là bị trượt đến năm sau lại được nên thật sự rất là hào hứng. Nó tạo ra động lực để giúp em nổ lực hơn.

Em nghĩ cảm giác bây giờ khi em vượt qua những khó khăn ở bậc đại học em không còn thấy hào hứng kiểu như trước đây nữa, chỉ cảm thấy nhẹ nhõm hơn, cảm xúc trầm xuống. Tuy nhiên cảm giác vẫn là tích cực

Bao (Interviewer): What were your motives/desires in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?

Dai:

Thực sự là em muốn có thêm một ngoại ngữ nữa để em dễ dàng giao tiếp với mọi người, càng nhiều người càng tốt. Thực sự là việc học tiếng Anh đã tiếp thêm cho em đôi cánh nữa để giúp em rất nhiều. Gần như đi đâu em cũng dùng được. Kể cả nó còn hỗ trợ em trong việc học những cái khác nữa. Nên đó chính là động lực để em tiếp tục học. Em hiện học thêm lập trình nữ trên mạng. Chính tiếng Anh giúp em tìm thêm nguồn tài liệu mới để tiếp tục tự học không cần quá nhiều sự hướng dẫn của người khác. Cả tiếng Anh và lập trình đều là niềm yêu thích của em.

Tiếng Anh vừa giúp mình học thêm được những cái khác và còn giúp mình giao tiếp với mọi người dễ dàng hơn

Type of learners identified by the learners themselves

Bao (interviewer): In terms of your response to challenges in your language learning experience, do you think of yourself as a typical language learner? What in your view makes you typical or atypical? Do you think other learners are like you in this respect?

Dai:

Nếu xét về việc vượt qua khó khăn trong qua trình học tiếng Anh thì em nghĩ em là người đặc trưng chính vì điều kiện thiếu thốn về tài liệu, chất lượng giáo viên phần đông không tốt. Chính vì thế bắt buộc mình phải tìm chỗ khác.

Em nghĩ sẽ có một thành phần nhất định là giống em ở điểm này nhưng có thể một số sẽ không có cơ may vượt qua được vì họ không gặp đúng người chẳn hạn hoặc là không thể tìm được tài liệu.

Thực ra chính cái việc đi ôn học sinh giỏi thì cá kỹ năng của em còn đạt đỉnh hơn bây giờ vì từ lúc xong đổi tuyển đấy là em thấy kỹ năng của em cũng chỉ đứng yên chứ không có đi lên được thêm nữa. Em hy vọng là có thêm thời gian để luyện tập thêm và hy vọng sẽ nhận được sự giúp đỡ từ phí thầy cô giảng viên để hỗ trợ cải thiện thêm.

APPENDIX L: Semi-structured interview protocol

THEMES		SUB-THEMES	QUESTIONS
CHALLENGES DIFFICULTIES	CONTEXTUAL	Social setting	1. Could you share with me a bit about where you are from before entering university? 2. What could be considered as difficulties/challenges that hindered your English language learning living in such a place? 3. In what way do you think these might have affected your language learning?
		Family background	4. Could you share with me some information about your family? 5. How do you think your family background may have played a part in your language learning?
		Educational background/Learning environment	6. Think back over the time when you were at school, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges to your language learning in terms of your learning experience? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods) 7. In terms of the learning environment at the university level, what difficulties/challenges do you think you are facing in learning English? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods)
	INDIVIDUAL INTERACTIONAL		8. In terms of your interpersonal relationships, including social, familial and educational ones, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges in the process of learning English? 9. How did they affect your language learning? 10. In the face of difficulties/challenges, what kinds of feelings/psychological factors do you think might have limited your language learning?
BEHAVIOURS/ PROTECTIVE FACTORS	BEHAVIOURS		11. In terms of your response to difficulties/challenges, what did you do to overcome them?
	RESOURCES		12. Who/what could you take advantage of in order to sustain your language learning in response to the challenges/challenges?
	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS		13. What did you think/how did you feel in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties? 14. What were your motives/desires in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?
The question used to end the interview			15. In terms of your response to challenges in your language learning experience, do you think of yourself as a typical language learner? What in your view makes you typical or atypical? Do you think other learners are like you in this respect?

APPENDIX M: Letter to apply for the extension to research ethics approval and questions for semi-structured interview

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Hoang, Khanh Bao. I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education - Student ID 1316287. I am conducting a research project entitled FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESILIENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT under the supervision of Assoc.Prof. Margaret Franken and Dr Judy Hunter. My ethics application for this study was approved on the 7th of February 2018. At present, I am in the process of collecting data for my study in Vietnam.

As specified in my ethics application, the data collection procedure includes 3 stages in which information in the first stage (focus groups) will serve as the basis for the refinement of the questions used in semi-structured interviews with students and I am expected to send a memo to the Ethics Committee for the refinement of the questions. I have finished with the first stage of data collection and have also refined the questions for the student interviews.

I am sending to the Committee the memo with a list of refined questions for the semi-structured interviews. As I intended to conduct the interview in Vietnamese, the questions in this memo are the translation for the Committee. I would be grateful if the Committee could approve it so that I can continue with the data collection.

As my time in Vietnam is limited and I have to return to New Zealand in the first week of October 2018, I would also very grateful if the Committee could approve the amendments as quickly as possible.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Bao Hoang
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
The University of Waikato
Cell: 022 626 1359

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

1. Could you share with me a bit about where you are from before entering university?
2. What could be considered as difficulties/challenges that hindered your English language learning living in such a place?
3. In what way do you think these might have affected your language learning?
4. Could you share with me some information about your family?
5. How do you think your family background may have played a part in your language learning?
6. Think back over the time when you were at school, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges to your language learning in terms of your learning experience? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods)
7. In terms of the learning environment at the university level, what difficulties/challenges do you think you are facing in learning English? (including school facilities, materials, and teaching methods)
8. In terms of your interpersonal relationships, including social, familial and educational ones, what could be considered as difficulties/challenges in the process of learning English?
9. How did they affect your language learning?
10. In the face of difficulties/challenges, what kinds of feelings/psychological factors do you think might have limited your language learning?
11. In terms of your response to difficulties/challenges, what did you do to overcome them?
12. Who/what could you take advantage of in order to sustain your language learning in response to the challenges/challenges?
13. What did you think/how did you feel in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?
14. What were your motives/desires in the course of overcoming challenges/difficulties?
15. In terms of your response to challenges in your language learning experience, do you think of yourself as a typical language learner? What in your view makes you typical or atypical? Do you think other learners are like you in this respect?

Dean's Office
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: **Bao Hoang**

cc: AProf Margaret Franken
Dr Judy Hunter

From: **Dr Nicola Daly**
Co-chair Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Date: 20/9/18

Request for Extension to Research Ethics Approval – Student (FEDU005/18)

Thank you for your request for an extension to the ethics approval for the project:

FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNER RESILIENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

It is noted that as set out in your original ethics application, you have furnished us with questions for the second phase of your research in Vietnam, based on your focus group discussions in the first phase. These questions will be added to your ethics application file.

I am pleased to advise that this extension has received approval.

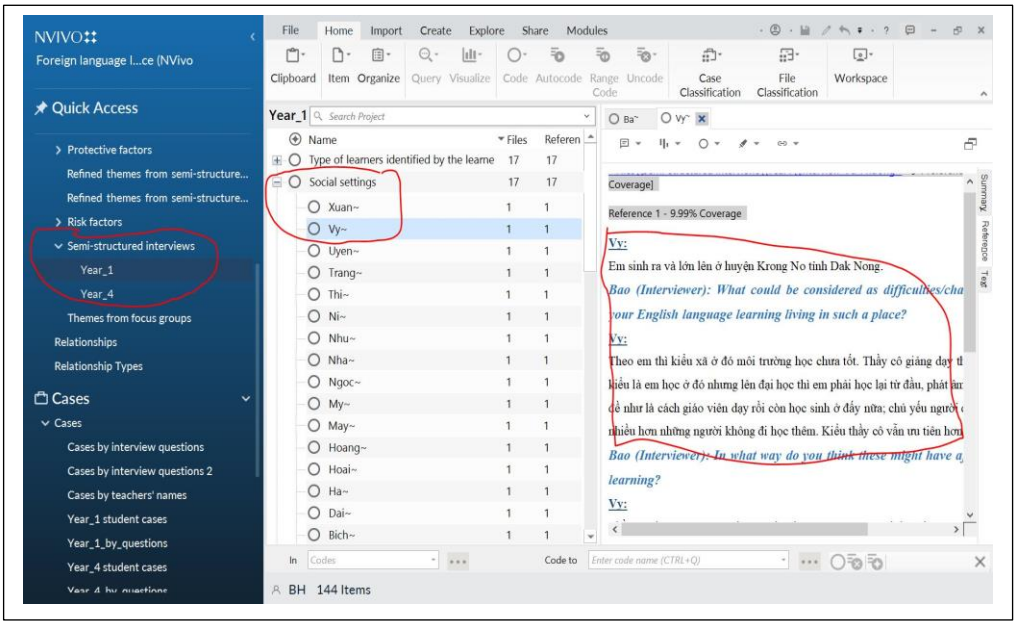
Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any further changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

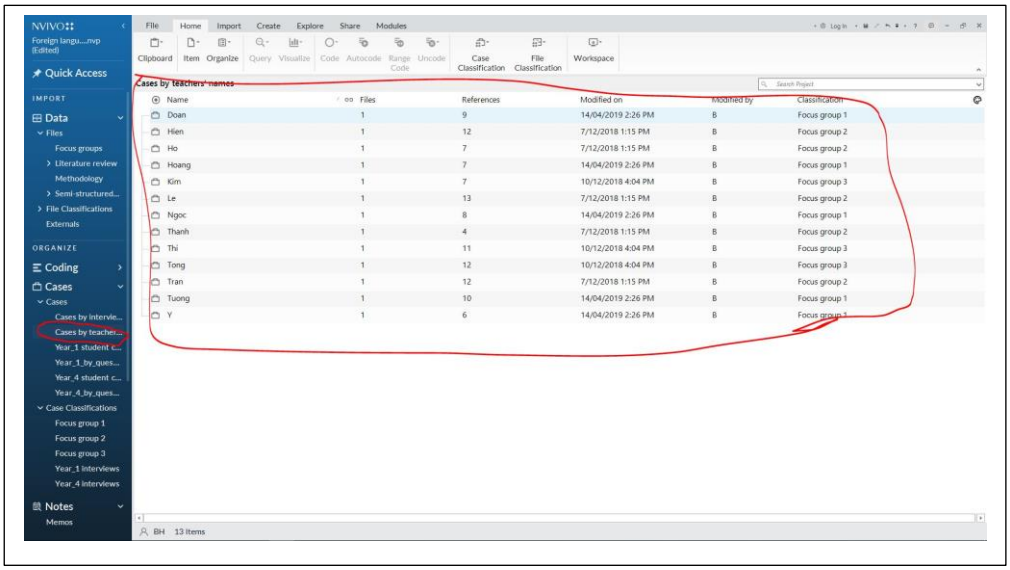
Nicola Daly

Dr Nicola Daly
Co-chair Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

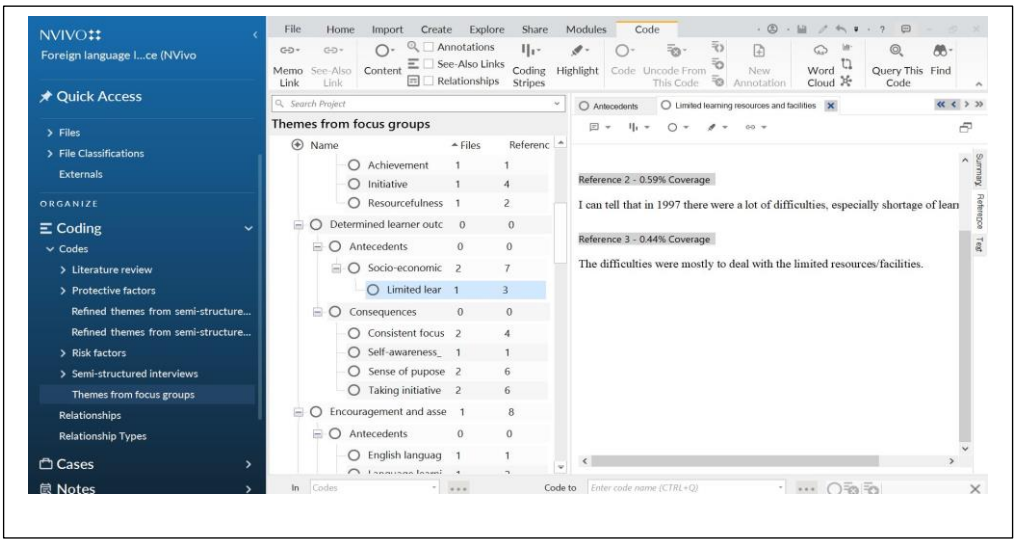
APPENDIX N: Screenshots of data analysis using Nvivo



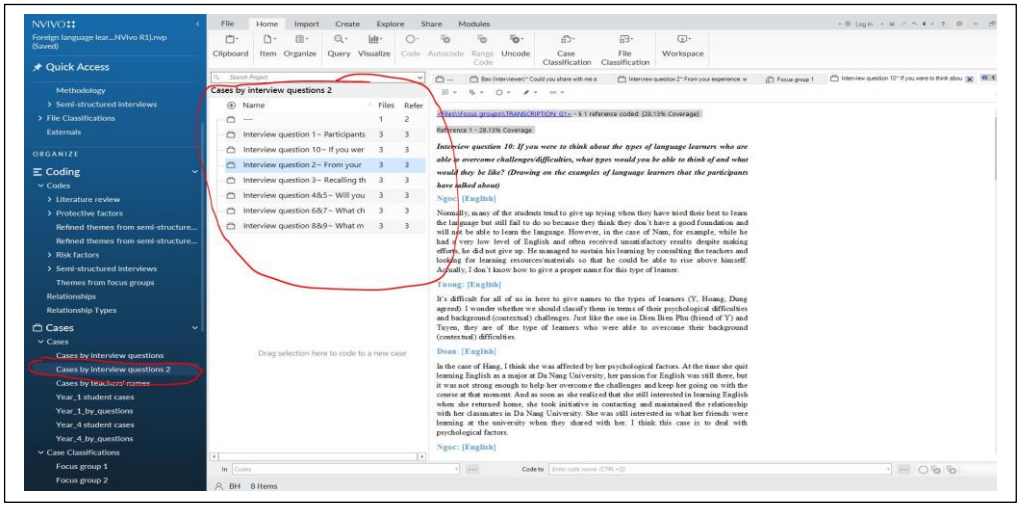
Categorisation of responses by participants' names



Categorisation of responses by interview questions



Themes from focus group data



Automatic coding of data from semi-structured interviews

Appendix O: Self-reflection form

You have started your English study at this university/in this course.

Many factors will impact on your success. It is helpful to reflect on these factors, how they affect you, and your way of responding to them.

This reflection can help:

- you to set goals and meet them, and
- me as your advisor/teacher understand you better and support your English language learning more effectively.

LOOKING BACK

	FAMILY (my family history)	**COMMUNITY/SOCIETY** (my previous social environment, hometown, etc)	**INSTITUTIONAL** (my previous experiences of learning English at school or university)
List some ways your past experiences in each of these contexts seem to have affected your English learning.	e.g. financial difficulty	e.g. chances to practise English with native speakers	e.g. traditional teaching methods
List some ways that these conditions affected your English learning.	e.g. made me study hard		

LOOKING FORWARD

What are my English language learning goals? (What do I want to focus on? What do I want to improve in particular?)	What are my plans to achieve these goals?

Who or what can I draw on as a resource to support my English learning?	How any/all of these might support me in my English language learning?
❒ Someone to talk to ❒ Peer help ❒ Teacher support ❒ Groups ❒ Online resources ❒ Other _____	